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N A T H A L I E ;

A T A L E.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN IN FRANCE," "MADELEINE," &c.

A creature not too pure or good
For human nature's daily food ;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

L O N D O N :

H E N R Y C O L B U R N, P U B L I S H E R,

G R E A T M A R L B O R O U G H S T R E E T.

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NATHALIE.

CHAPTER I.

NATHALIE pushed the door open a little, hesitatingly. There is a nameless sort of fear no argument can allay. But the place was as they had left it,—quiet and silent. The fire, however, had burned rather low; she closed the door, came forward, and stooped to arrange it. A slight sound made her raise her look with a start; the door opened slowly; a shadow darkened the floor. In the indistinct light, Nathalie perceived a man's form standing on the threshold; she concluded it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned for some unknown reason.

“What has happened, sir?” she asked, rising quickly; but she immediately drew back, with a faint scream, for, by the flickering firelight, she had perceived that it was not Monsieur de Sainville, but his nephew.

There was something in the sudden way in which Charles Marceau chose to appear before the lady of his thoughts, that always jarred disagreeably on her nerves, like an unexpected shock. She now stood, mute and pale, before him, with her hand laid on the table: she needed that support. He drew near the fire-place, and stooped to look at her.

“ Mademoiselle Montolieu !” he exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise, “ I could scarcely have hoped for this.”

Nathalie looked, and felt incredulous. It was strange, indeed, he should know of her presence there; yet she did not think he had come in by chance. She eyed him with mistrust: he stood on the spot lately occupied by his uncle; his arm rested on the mantel-shelf, and supported his head, which was partly bowed. She could not see his features; but she saw that his wet hair clung to his pale cheeks; his clothes looked heavy with rain. There was a brief silence; but ere long, his low and melancholy voice addressed her :

“ Believe me, I needed not this freezing silence to understand that your resentment was unabated. Oh ! it is strange, it is bitter, that a deep and devoted love should win nought save such unmitigated aversion !”

He looked up, as he spoke thus, in a moved tone. Nathalie remained cold and silent. She was romantic enough in her way; yet such language found with

her no sympathy. This is no uncommon case ; the key with which we win, or seek to win, a way to the hearts of others, is not always that which can unlock our own heart. On seeing her standing before him, cold and mute, like a marble statue, the young man could not help exclaiming, almost angrily :

“ What have I done ? To love you is no crime ! What have I done, to be thus treated ? ”

“ May I inquire what you mean by ‘ thus treated ? ’ ” she drily asked.

“ You will not even read a letter, breathing only the most respectful tenderness. What could you fear from it ? ”

“ Nothing, ” was the calm reply.

“ Then why so cruel as to return it unread ? ”

“ For two reasons : the first was, that the manner in which you sent that letter displeased me ; the second reason was, that I held myself tacitly bound to Madame Marceau to hold no communication whatsoever with you.”

She spoke with unruffled calmness. He remained moodily silent. She quietly resumed :

“ For the same reason, I shall feel deeply indebted to you, if you will be so good as to abridge this interview. I need surely not say how painful it will be to me if you remain here until the arrival of the servant, whom I expect every moment.”

“ Say rather that every moment of my presence here is hateful to you, ” he bitterly replied, for her

fearless composure verging on indifference offended him deeply.

“It is at least unbecoming here, sir,” she impatiently answered, annoyed at his repeated assertions of her supposed hatred.

“And why unbecoming?” he urged in the same bitter tone; “you were here alone with my uncle half an hour or more; why should it be so very unbecoming if I remain a few minutes with you?”

“You knew he was here?” exclaimed Nathalie drawing back with renewed mistrust.

“Yes I knew it,” he replied raising his look until it met hers and remained fastened on her face, fixed and ardent; “yes I knew it. I stood outside that window in the rain, looking at you: there is not a glance, a smile, a motion of yours during the last half-hour which I have not seen and do not remember. I strained my ear to catch the sound of your voice, when I saw your lips moving, but the wind was loud and only once could I hear; it was when you laughed. But of course it was quite natural that I should stand outside, thanking the keen night air for cooling the fever of my blood; quite natural that he who has no such fever to cool, I suppose, should be in here with you. He stood where I am standing now; you knelt there drying your hair before the fire; he could have touched it by just stretching out his hand so, yet you did not think it needful to be so very far away from him, or to stand,

as you do now, behind that table, with your look on the door. He spoke coldly enough, as it seemed to me, yet you smiled, laughed, and looked joyous. You drank out of that glass ; when you had done he drank out of it too, and perhaps his lips met the very place yours had touched. He went out alone, but you followed him of your own accord ; he offered you his arm, you took it unhesitatingly ; the ground was wet in many places ; he helped you over, and you did not shrink from him. I have never so much as asked to touch the hem of your robe ; and you turn from me with aversion. Why is this ? why must he who cares not for them, enjoy freedoms, innocent I grant, but denied me, to whom they would be delightful."

He spoke with rapid and jealous passion. A burning blush of anger and shame settled on Nathalie's cheek ; it deepened with every word he uttered, with every image he called up.

" Sir !" said she in angry justification, " I am free with Monsieur de Sainville, because he is my host, and, I believe, my friend, and also because, as you say, he cares not for those freedoms."

" And how do you know he cares not for them ?" exclaimed Charles Marceau, with all the unreasonableness and *maladresse* of genuine jealousy ; " do you think he will let you see it if he does ? Are you not beautiful for him as well as for any other man ? or is there a spell on his eyes that he should not see it ?"

“And if it were so, sir, and if he did see it,” exclaimed Nathalie, speaking with unrepressed indignation, “I should still be to him all that you accurately watched and saw this evening,”

“And why so?” gloomily asked Charles, “why so?”

“Because I have faith, unbounded faith in Monsieur de Sainville’s honour.” Her eye sparkled as she spoke, her cheeks were flushed, her lips trembled, and she pressed her clasped hands to her bosom. The young man turned very pale.

“Am I to understand,” he asked in a low tone, “that you mean to cast a doubt on my honour?”

She turned quickly towards him and replied with some emotion, “no, sir; heaven forbid!”

There was something so truthful and confiding in her face at that moment, that he did not see it was only the lingering trace of her previous emotion, and he conceived a sudden hope.

“Then, since you do not mistrust me,” he eagerly said; “since you are good enough to have some confidence in me, hear me, I beseech you.”

Nathalie shook her head with decisive denial.

“I have heard enough,” she said; “you have spoken to me as none ever spoke to me before; may I never hear such language again. Sir, it is not enough to love; there is such a thing as loving delicately; there is such a thing as not uttering language, accusations, and allusions that will make a woman

blush with unmerited shame. "I know," she added, noticing his darkening brow, "that this frankness offends you; yet I can retract nothing of what you have provoked me to say. You are proud—resent it; and let resentment, if you will, take the place of any other feeling—I shall not complain."

He looked at her with anger, in which blended irrepressible tenderness.

"You need not urge me to hate you," he passionately exclaimed; "I know very well I ought, and I know I shall do so, some day; but I know also, that now, do what I will, I cannot. Haughty girl! Do you know this? do you know you never look half so bewitching as when you wear that proud look and scornful smile? Do you know that your very pride wins, when seeming most to repel; that it has a charm which only draws me more irresistibly to your feet?"

But Nathalie was not touched. In vain he pleaded that his indiscreet language was only the result of passion and of a momentary and absurd jealousy; she could not forgive him the watching at the window; least of all could she forgive his construction on what he had seen. He tried to explain, and made matters worse; then he fell back on the old theme of his love, and poured forth protestation on protestation with rapid and rising eloquence; she heard him with impatience at first, and then with weariness and *ennui* on her face.

"You are not from the south, for you have a

heart of ice," he at length exclaimed, with irrepressible anger; "I am made to talk of love to you. Love! you cannot love."

A rapid blush suffused Nathalie's face.

"You know nothing about it," she replied hastily.

She stood before him, her arms folded on her bosom, her face turned towards him with a haughty smile; and as she thus unhesitatingly vindicated herself from the reproach of unwomanly heartlessness cast upon her, there was in her look, in her smile, and in her bearing, a provoking sort of grace, not free perhaps from unconscious coquetry, but which was certainly feminine, and, though she knew it not, irresistibly alluring.

He had been pacing the room up and down; he stopped short to look at her; emotion succeeded anger on his features: he felt the spell; approached her, and said in a low submissive tone:

"Be merciful, then! Teach me how I can make you love me."

She had not expected he would take her words as a sort of advance; his doing so offended her. She said in a distant tone:

"As I perceive, sir, you have not the generosity to desist and leave me, do not wonder if I leave you."

But even as she spoke, a sudden change came over the saturnine features of her exacting lover: she saw him start, change colour, and step back hastily, with his look fastened on the door behind her. She

turned quickly round, and saw, not the expected servant, but the pale and angry face of Monsieur de Sainville, as he stood on the threshold, holding the half-open door in his hand.

He closed it; came forward and sat down by the fireside, without once looking at Nathalie, or removing his menacing glance from Charles Marceau. But the calmness of his voice, when he spoke, contrasted strikingly with the stern meaning of his face.

“Charles,” said he, quietly, “what has brought you here? I thought you were in Paris.”

“I have been ill, sir,” replied the young man, with a confusion that soon wore off.

His uncle eyed him from head to foot with a very expressive gaze.

“I am much better now,” continued his nephew; “but the doctor advised change of air—my native air, and so I came —”

“You were born and bred at Havre,” coldly interrupted his uncle, “and Havre is some ten leagues off; I suppose you were on your way there, and could not resist the temptation of seeing your mother *en passant*. I need not tell you how much she will value this attention, and be pained at your ill-health.”

“Sir,” said the young man, colouring, “allow me to say you have no right to express these doubts. This letter, which I had written beforehand, for your perusal, and which contains another letter, addressed to me by my medical attendant, ought not to

be needed to convince you of the truth of my assertions."

He produced a sealed letter, and handed it to his uncle as he spoke. Nathalie could not help trying to divine the expression of Monsieur de Sainville's features, as he perused his nephew's epistle by the fire-light; that expression was easy to read—it was one of unmitigated scepticism.

"Why," said he, looking up from the paper, and glancing at Charles, "it seems that you are threatened with consumption, whereupon this wise doctor sends you to Normandy. I should have suggested the south of France, decidedly. But even this," he added, after a slight pause, "does not explain why, instead of entering the château by the front gate, and asking to see me, you wander about the grounds, on a rainy night, with a letter for me in your pocket."

"Sir," calmly answered his nephew, "do you forget that when we parted, I pledged my word not to return without your permission?"

"I do not forget it, I assure you," was the dry reply.

"Then cease to wonder at the hesitation I felt in appearing before you. I left this afternoon the village where I am staying; the storm overtook me near Sainville; I found one of the smaller gates of these grounds open—I entered unseen; I intended spending the night in this place, and, as I felt anxious not

to alarm my mother, either to wait here until you came, or until I met some servant who might become my messenger to you."

"All this is plausible, Charles,—too plausible by far," quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville. "We have in France such an institution as the post-office, to which you might have confided your letter. To come here as you came was the very way to alarm your mother; to speak to a servant, the very way to let her know of your presence. You have broken your word to me, but I do not resent this half so much as your want of candour in not confessing a feeling which—you may as well know it—is your only excuse in my eyes. Why, when I asked the reason of your return, had you not the frankness to say: 'I came back here, led by a passion which wise men call folly, but which subdues the reason of the very wisest; I entered this place, not by a scarcely possible chance, but because I knew that she whom I sought was here.' I blame you, Charles, for shrinking from the avowal of what most men take pride in,—passion, and its follies."

The young man coloured deeply at this unexpected reproof; and Nathalie asked herself if it were indeed the grave, the cold Monsieur de Sainville who had thus spoken.

"You are severe, sir," exclaimed the young man, with ill-repressed irritation; "but ask yourself how I could confide in one whose native coldness, indiffe-

rence, and rooted scepticism, in matters of the heart, I knew so well?"

A slight hectic flush crossed the pale cheek of Monsieur de Sainville. Nathalie perhaps ought not to have looked, but look she did, as if attracted by an irresistible spell ; his glance met hers, and though he was a grave man, and she but a young girl, he coloured, looked disconcerted, and turned his glance away ; but he recovered almost immediately, and addressing his nephew, said, in his most composed tone :

" This at least is a sensible excuse ; but to spare you unnecessary trouble, to render this explanation more clear and brief, I may as well inform you that you have little or nothing to disguise from me ; that, attracted by the sound of voices, I returned to this place in time to overhear a warm and generous vindication of my honour drawn forth by accusations which I did not hear, for which I do not care, but the nature of which I can, by what followed, guess easily."

Charles Marceau slightly turned pale ; a burning blush overspread Nathalie's face.

" Then you listened," exclaimed the young man.

" Precisely ;—I listened ; for a few moments, at least," very calmly returned his uncle.

" You ! sir ; you, a gentleman !" and the word was uttered with indignant emphasis.

" A gentleman, as you say," replied Monsieur de Sainville, looking him full and firmly in the face.

“ Monsieur de Sainville,” angrily cried the young man, “ you told me yourself that in certain matters you would never interfere; that the authority to which I freely submitted should never extend to feelings which would render it unbearable; you have upbraided me with breach of my word; allow me to ask if you keep yours?”

Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville with some alarm; but he remained quite composed, folded his arms across his breast, and eyed his nephew with a stern smile.

“ Charles,” said he, in his most unruffled tones, “ do not talk so loud when you are in a lady’s presence; and if you can, speak more sensibly when you speak to a man of the world. I say this as advice; the delusion under which you labour,—namely, that I listened to pry into your feelings, and interfere with your actions, is too absurd for me to resent it. Love where you like,—act as you like; should your conduct reach a certain point, I shall know how to throw off the responsibility of your actions. You have broken your word; mine is still, and ever will be, inviolate. No matter what I may think of what I happened to overhear this evening,—rest assured that your mother’s brother will never remember it.”

He uttered this with a calmness that deeply disconcerted the young man, then turned towards Nathalie, and resumed, now speaking with the

ease of a man of the world, and the courtesy of a gentleman :

“ It was the host and friend of Mademoiselle Montolieu, who, finding her subjected once more to an intrusion which he had hoped would never occur again whilst she resided here, heard enough to convince himself that the conversation was on her part a most involuntary one, and came forward when it was his evident duty to interfere.”

“ Mademoiselle Montolieu is fortunate in such guardianship,” bitterly said Charles.

“ Yes, sir, Mademoiselle Montolieu is very fortunate, indeed,” quickly replied Nathalie, going up, involuntarily perhaps, to Monsieur de Sainville’s chair as she spoke, and thence looking at Charles with a little indignant air.

The child-like warmth and action made Monsieur de Sainville smile ; he raised his look, eyed her with a slow and silent gaze, then turned once more towards his nephew, and said, in a much milder tone :

“ I think, Charles, we have had enough of explanations. For the sake of a passion there is so much to justify, I overlook the fact that you have broken, or almost broken your word to me. For the same reason, I will endeavour to forget that you have presumed to intrude upon a young lady residing under my roof, consequently under my express protection. But let such an occurrence never take place again.”

This sudden and unexpected leniency surprised the young girl; but Charles Marceau looked dark and moody. His uncle resumed :

“ With regard to the authority you have allowed me over you—I need not remind you that it was not of my own seeking—you shall be released from it the moment you wish.”

He spoke rather more coldly now; but Charles had once more become quite cool and collected: he gravely replied,

“ I may have spoken hastily, sir, but I do not think I have expressed that desire.”

“ I suppose you do not object to return to Paris immediately?”

“ I shall do so.”

“ Then I believe,” observed Monsieur de Sainville, rising, “ that there is no more to say.”

“ Uncle,” said the young man, stepping forward, and, for the first time, addressing his relative thus: “ Allow me to say a few words to Mademoiselle Montolieu, before she goes.”

“ No, no,” hastily said Nathalie, drawing closer to Monsieur de Sainville, as if fearing he would leave her alone with his nephew; “ you have nothing to say, sir,—I have nothing to hear.”

“ I meant in the presence of my uncle,” said the young man, looking much mortified.

“ Will you not hear what he has to say?” asked Monsieur de Sainville.

She hesitated ; but sat down, in token of compliance.

Monsieur de Sainville drew away a few steps ; Charles confronted them both.

“ Uncle,” said he, quietly, “ allow me first to ask you a question. You know that I love this young lady, who seemed so indignant at the idea of remaining a few seconds alone with me : do you believe my affection sincere and true ?”

“ And pray,” replied Monsieur de Sainville, with haughty surprise, “ how should I know the nature of your affection ?”

“ Because you can distinguish between the truth and the mockery of passion,” replied his nephew, with a fixed look ; “ because, if report speaks true, you once loved, yourself—ay, and loved so deeply, as not to care to love again.”

Nathalie’s head was resting on her hand ; but she looked up very suddenly. Monsieur de Sainville saw her not—his face was pale and rigid with astonished passion ; his blue eyes, generally as calm as the surface of deep, but unstirred waters, now shone with angry light. He made an effort to be composed, and merely said, in a low tone, “ Charles !”

“ Yes, sir, I know,” returned the young man, “ I know I am recalling the memory of a bitter past ; but you have humbled me—you have made me look like a child found at fault, unworthy of serious reproof—chid for awhile, and forgiven. Think of

the time when you loved as I love, and wonder not if I feel reckless."

Monsieur de Sainville looked keenly at Charles. The wrathful expression of his face gradually subsided, until it wholly vanished, and yielded to a sort of calm surprise, perhaps at his nephew's daring, perhaps at his own easily-moved anger; but of a surprise in which there blended at least a certain degree of admiration.

"I rather like daring," he said, at length; "but it is a sharp weapon to handle. Do not repeat this evening's experiment. Who knows whether it would succeed a second time? Yet say what you have to say freely. You seem to think I have slighted you, in a manner and in a presence which made the slight doubly keen; for what man but wishes to be honoured and esteemed by the woman he admires and loves? If I have done so, I have indeed wronged you;—speak out, and prove it."

He spoke thus himself, with the firm and manly dignity of one who loved to assert his own strong will; but made not himself its slave, nor that of any passion, however subtle the disguise of right and justice it might wear.

Nathalie looked at him with sympathetic admiration. She had not that inflexible and conscientious judgment,—that calm will, ever ready to act, guide, or restrain, with scarce the seeming of an effort; but she admired these qualities with the superstitious reverence

which the inexperienced mariner feels for the pilot who guides his barque through foaming breaker and stormy wave, and leads it thence, with calm eye and ever steady hand, into the broad, still waters. She liked courage and energy, too ; and could not help casting on Charles Marceau a glance more kindly than any he had yet won from her. But the young man seemed already to repent the bold language which had led to all this. He stood before his uncle, in an attitude between hesitation, doubt, and surprise, half shunning Monsieur de Sainville's steady glance, and looking not unlike a wary archer, who for once has overshot his mark, and coolly meditates a surer aim.

“ Uncle,” he slowly said, “ I never accused you of wronging me. I spoke, indeed, under the influence of strong emotion, else I should not have recalled to your memory a painful past.”

“ Then he is not so daring after all,” thought Nathalie, rather scornfully, and true to the feminine instinct of admiring courage, whether moral or physical. Yet she wronged the young man. Whatever his faults might be, he was no coward. But love was not his only aim in life ; he had another mistress besides Nathalie to please ; one whose favour he prized no less than hers, and sought not with less patient eagerness—Ambition. His uncle could do much to make that proud lady gracious ; and Charles knew it.

“Then what do you want of me?” asked Monsieur de Sainville.

He spoke sharply, and looked almost disappointed at this sudden calming down from audacity to prudence.

“Nothing,” respectfully replied his nephew, “save that you would help to efface an impression you have helped to produce.”

“I have agreed to forward your views in life; but not, I think, your affairs of the heart,” replied Monsieur de Sainville, with ill-concealed irony. “Still, if you think me bound to do so in justice——”

“In generosity,” interrupted Charles.

“Or if you think I can serve in such matters, why then be it so.”

“Then, since you do not object,” composedly said Charles.

“Object!” asked his uncle, with a peculiar smile, “why should I?”

“I will request your opinion and advice.”

“Opinion and advice!” echoed Monsieur de Sainville; “I never ask or take, and rarely give either; but if you value mine, you are welcome to them.”

He sat down as he spoke thus, with evident carelessness, as if the passing interest he had for a moment felt were now suddenly gone. Nathalie, surprised and hurt that he should so readily agree to interfere in this matter, gave him a half-offended look, but he did not heed it. He sat back in his chair, half-

reclining, with arms folded, look sedate, and in an attitude of cold and negligent dignity. He seemed like one who may lend himself to the common uses of daily life, but who never forgets that his realm and province lie far beyond,—where?—within himself, perchance.

There was in all this something so indifferent and so haughty, that, for a moment, Nathalie thought, almost angrily, “ Why, who, and what is that man, that he should set himself above such things, or make himself so much of a ruler and a king?”

“ Well,” said he, very quietly, “ you do not speak, Charles?”

The young man was looking at Nathalie with a half-entreating, half-watchful look, as if bidding her note the words he was going to utter—the reply they would win.

Monsieur de Sainville raised his head, followed the direction of his nephew’s look, smiled, resumed his old attitude, and said, “ I am waiting.”

“ Why not *we* are waiting: it would be more royal a great deal,” indignantly thought the young girl.

Monsieur de Sainville noticed her flushed face, and quietly asked if she found the room too close. Nathalie, a little disconcerted, did not answer. Charles, whose pause was not one of hesitation, but of thought, now spoke:

“ Sir, do you believe in my attachment for Mademoiselle Montolieu?”

“ Certainly,” was the calm reply.

“ Do you object to that attachment?”

“ Object to it! no; why should I?”

“ Do you approve it?” He spoke low, but with a fixed look. Monsieur de Sainville returned the glance, and said, very calmly:

“ To approve would be to admit that I have a right to object. My guardianship over either you or Mademoiselle Montolieu extends not so far.”

“ May I know, uncle, in what light you view that attachment?” placidly urged Charles.

“ As a thing that concerns me not,” frigidly replied his uncle; “ my only concern in this matter is to see that Mademoiselle Montolieu is not annoyed: you may feel what you like.”

“ But you do not object to it?” said Charles, again.

“ No,” again replied his uncle, smiling, as if he had no difficulty in understanding why Charles persisted in his question.

The young man looked at Nathalie; there was something of triumph in his look, which brought a more scornful light to her eyes. She understood, and resented his meaning.

“ Uncle,” resumed Charles, once more addressing his relative, “ allow me now to ask your advice. When a man loves a woman, and is so unfortunate as not to be able to convince her of his affection, what can he do?”

“ Persist or desist,—just as he chooses,” dryly replied Monsieur de Sainville.

“ But what do you advise me to do ?” persisted Charles.

“ Convince Mademoiselle Montolieu, if you can, Charles ; and if you cannot, do not torment her.”

“ But you advise me to convince her, if I can,” urged Charles.

“ By all means,” was the unhesitating reply.

“ And you do not object to my passion ?”

“ No,” impatiently answered his uncle.

Nathalie coloured and looked offended. Charles turned towards her ; his look was downcast ; his voice measured and low.

“ Mademoiselle,” said he calmly, “ you were good enough on my uncle’s solicitation to agree to listen to me. It may be long before we meet again : you have refused to hear me alone : you know what I feel for you ; allow me to ask if I may hope ?”

Nathalie did not answer. He repeated his question, still she gave him no reply. A third time he asked.

“ May I hope ?”

She looked up, and said quietly.

“ You may hope, sir, since you call it so, or not hope—just as you please. I have nothing to do with either feeling.”

“ Is this scorn ?” he asked, turning pale.

“ No, sir, by no means,” she answered with some-

thing like gentleness ; “ it is simply that you have asked me a question you have no right to ask.”

“ Uncle,” exclaimed Charles, “ I appeal to you ; was my question fair ?”

“ I am no arbiter in this case,” replied Monsieur de Sainville, speaking very coldly.

“ In the name of justice, sir, I conjure you to answer me : was that question a fair question ?”

“ I think it was a fair question,” gravely replied Monsieur de Sainville, thus adjured.

“ I deny it, I deny it,” exclaimed Nathalie rising as she spoke, looking indignantly at Monsieur de Sainville, and haughtily at his nephew ; “ I deny it, and since you will have the truth, sir,—why, you may hear it. I refuse to answer, because I do not think that words and protestations give a claim to the attention, which is implied by the fact of answering. When a man has proved the truth and courage of his affection, when though he should not win love, he may at least compel esteem and respect, then perhaps, but not till then, he may ask a plain question, and expect a plain reply. Mind, sir, I do not accuse you ; I merely say that I know you not.”

Charles said nothing, but he evidently chafed inwardly. Monsieur de Sainville, who had been observing Nathalie’s changing face with some attention, now observed with a smile that seemed to imply he was not indifferent to the perverse pleasure of provoking her a little further :

“Pray do not imagine I meant you were bound to reply, but allow me to ask if you do not take too rigid and exclusive a view of so important a question. Proofs! What man can give proofs of mere feelings? What woman is sufficiently impartial to test the proofs when given? Would it not be safer to go at once on the principle of believing in the affection professed?”

“Sir,” said Nathalie turning towards him with a kindling look, “allow me to say you evidently do not understand either this subject or me.”

“Indeed!” he interjected, looking rather amused.

“Yes, indeed,” she echoed; “you seem to think I am guided by prudence; I am not, sir; I am guided by pride.”

“Pride is a dangerous guide, Mademoiselle Montlieu,” he observed with a smile.

“But at least frank and true,” she replied, with some energy. “Sir, men have many ways of vindicating their honour and asserting their dignity,—woman but one. I am—whatever my station may be—a woman, and I will exact as much observance and respect as any great lady; neither poverty nor obscure birth shall make me ‘bate one atom of my pride. Monsieur Marceau is free to carry his affections elsewhere; if he wishes to know my mind, he shall bide my pleasure and my time. I will not admit that, for having spoken to me three times—every time against my will—one, of whom I other-

wise know nothing, has a claim to a serious reply, or a right to be heard. Women are surely not so cheap that such mere attentions should make a man win or lose them!"

She spoke with all the eloquent rapidity of southern vehemence, without a second's pause or a moment's hesitation.

"I believe, Charles," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "that this is decisive."

"Decisive!" echoed the young man, in a tone of subdued irritation; "How so? If Mademoiselle Montolieu has refused to say 'hope,' she has not said 'do not hope.' Why, then, should I not, as you yourself advised me, sir, seek to convince and change her?"

"Provided she permits your attentions," coldly said his uncle.

"No, no," quickly exclaimed Nathalie; "I do not, —I will not."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Charles, in a low tone, "this is strange and contradictory. You exact proofs, and then refuse them. Shall I ask if you are capricious?"

"And shall I ask, sir, if you are free to give those proofs?" coldly replied Nathalie. "I speak not in a spirit of recrimination," she added, more gently, as she saw him change colour. "I might have alluded to this before, but I thought it more just and generous to consider the offer of your affection in itself, and

without reference to circumstances over which you had no control. But though I reproach you not for that which is no fault of yours, wonder not if I decline attentions your mother would oppose or resent, and to accept which would imply, on my part, either the meanest perfidy or the most heroic patience, as I chose to deceive or brave her. Perfidious I never will be; and patient, sir, you know well enough that I am not."

The young man did not answer. What could he say? His uncle rose, walked up to Nathalie, and laying his hand gently on her arm, said to his nephew, eyeing him steadily as he spoke :

"Charles, you love this young girl. I do not blame you; and if, spite of all the obstacles which rise against your passion, you choose to persist, why, then, love on, and run your chance. Fortune may end by befriending you. But, in the meantime, do not forget this: through your own imprudence, this same young girl has become my guest; she is under the shield of my roof, name, and honour. You have yourself heard her accepting this guardianship, which shall only be to protect, and never to control her. I shall, therefore, no more permit an intrusion on her privacy than if she were my sister or my child. Feel as you like, and as much as you like; but confine yourself to feeling. Should anything like what has happened this evening occur again, I warn you that I shall not be so easily appeased; but that I shall resent

it as much, and precisely in the same way, as if we were the merest strangers, without one drop of the same blood.” He spoke imperatively, and looked almost stern; but, as if repenting this, he resumed, in his usual tone: “I speak thus to warn, not to threaten. I have faith in your good sense and honour.”

Thus saying, he quietly passed the unresisting arm of Nathalie within his own, and left the hermitage.

The young man did not reply. His face was pale; his lips were compressed. He walked up to the door, and stood there motionless. His moody and abstracted glance long followed the two forms, now slowly vanishing in the evening obscurity.

CHAPTER II.

THE walk home was silent. The rain had ceased ; Monsieur de Sainville led his companion by the terraces ; it was the longer but also the dryer way. Once when they came to a pool of water, visible by the faint and trembling moonlight, he lifted her over it with as little hesitation and as much ease as if she were a child. She gave him a half-offended look, but on seeing how abstracted he looked, and how little he evidently thought of the cause of her displeasure, she had discretion enough to feel that it would be better not to seem offended. She did not speak until they entered the lime-tree avenue.

“ Where are we going, sir ? ” she then asked.

“ To the library, unless you object. There is a private staircase by which you can go up to your own room at once. It is therefore shorter than to go by the front entrance.”

Nathalie by no means objected. She had now been

out several hours; her long absence would be thought strange; the sooner she could change her attire and make her appearance, the better.

It was Monsieur de Sainville's habit to have every room devoted to his separate use lit at a certain hour, whether he was present or not.

He disliked to repeat the same orders evening after evening; indeed, whenever he took a new servant he gave him a concise and exact account of his duties; informing him that this account was given once for all, that he consequently hoped not to be under the necessity of having to repeat it; and, thanks to the quiet authority of his manner, the necessity rarely occurred. It was owing to this peculiarity that Nathalie now found the library quite solitary, but in a brilliant state of illumination. A large lamp shed its light on the table; and waxlights, which had been burning for some time in silver sconces hanging against the walls, filled the place with their clear pale ray.

No spot of a room where Monsieur de Sainville chose to be, was to remain in inconvenient obscurity. Few men cared so little for the more delicate luxuries of life, but few, also, made everything within their sphere and power so subservient to their will as he did to his.

“That man turns the very lights into his obedient slaves,” thought Nathalie, a little indignantly. A rapid look, given whilst Monsieur de Sainville closed the door, had sufficed her to observe all this, and to

comment upon it inwardly. As he came forward she remembered, and looked for, the private staircase he had mentioned, but looked in vain; she could only see two doors, that by which they had just entered, and that which led to the hall. Sign of other egress there was none. She looked puzzled and he amused.

“I see,” said he, “that you are impatient to go; but we cannot part thus. You are a little vexed with me, are you not?”

He spoke with a smile which displeased Nathalie, and made her look as she felt; but he was one to bear a lady’s displeasure with equal composure and courtesy, and still waited her answer. She hesitated—then replied with sudden promptness:

“Yes, sir, I am vexed with you.”

He looked more amused than alarmed, and said quietly:

“Pray, what have I done?”

She remained silent.

“You will not tell me my offence?”

No reply.

“What! not even a hint?”

She looked up and eyed him very composedly.

“I will tell you, sir,” she said, “if you will only assure me you do not know or guess.”

“Mademoiselle Montolieu,” he replied, in a tone of feeling reproach, “this answer does not sound like yours, for it is not quite frank; there is a decided air of Norman and legal ambiguousness about it; how-

ever, it implies so flattering a belief in my veracity that I know not how to complain. You are vexed with me because I spoke as I did, and yet I scarcely regret it; for had I not spoken so, I should not know with how much spirit, courage, and frankness a young girl could assert the privileges and dignity of her sex."

He spoke quite seriously now; he spoke too in words of praise, rare at any time from his lips, and for the first time addressed to Nathalie by him. She felt moved, but did not reply; he resumed in his old manner:

"Pray let us be friends; it is unnatural for guardian and ward to quarrel."

"Unnatural!" said Nathalie, half-turning round with a demure smile; "why all the old plays and tales I ever read ran on the quarrels of guardians and wards."

"But we will do better."

"Yes, much better. Besides, guardians in those times seem to have been peevish and so old."

"Then we are friends?" he said again, without seeming to heed this remark.

She smiled, and spontaneously held out her hand in token of reconciliation. He took it, and looked at her, with smiling kindness, as a father might look at his child.

"Poor little thing!" he said, at length, when she began to wonder at his silence; "I dare say you have not many friends here?"

"Two," she answered.

“ Two ! ” said he, surprised ; “ I thought you had only your sister.”

She too looked surprised.

“ And my guardian,” she said, half in jest—half in earnest.

He looked at her ; she coloured involuntarily, and without knowing why ; something like a sudden cloud passed across his brow ; he did not drop her hand, but his hold relaxed ; she wished to withdraw it, for she had an uncomfortable sensation of having gone too far ; but he detained it firmly within his, and said, very seriously :

“ Yes, you have two friends.”

He let her hand go, went to the library, and touched a spring ; one of the compartments, which Nathalie had thought to be filled with books, opened, and disclosed steep and narrow steps, winding away into deepening gloom. He stood below, holding the lamp, whilst she went up ; she was light and agile, and reached the top of the staircase without one false step ; there a door, which yielded to her touch, admitted her into the long passage, at the end of which stood her own room. She remembered having heard Aunt Radegonde say that the door facing this led to one of the turrets—no doubt that of Monsieur de Sainville. This accounted for his being so seldom met or seen in the other parts of the château.

She had soon changed her dress ; but as she smoothed her hair, she suddenly missed a narrow

velvet, which she wore bound several times around her head, according to the fashion of the period. This velvet, a present from Aunt Radegonde, worn that day for the first time, was, unfortunately, distinguished by a little silver edge. She concluded she had left it in the hermitage.

“*Allons!*” she impatiently thought; “I hoped to keep all this quiet; but I suppose that the first servant who goes in there to-morrow morning will know of my presence, thanks to that velvet and its silver edge.”

She felt provoked, and then pride asked, “Why should she care?” and bade her go down quite composedly to the drawing-room.

Madame Marceau sat in majestic state, with her pile of cushions behind and around her, and something of haughtiness in the very way in which her feet rested on a broad stool. With her shawl, her silks, her sparkling jewels, and her dark face, on which the light of the lamp now shone full and clear, she looked like a handsome eastern despot. Nathalie paused near the door, to look at the haughty lady.

“When will that woman wish me to be her daughter?” she thought, remembering what had passed that same evening.

She slowly came forward, and silently took her usual seat. How much had occurred since she had left that drawing-room a few hours before! Madame Marceau was not alone; her friend partly reclined on

a low couch, where, with her indolent attitude and half-closed eyes, she looked like a languid sultana, as calm and apathetic as the other was active and restless. They were engaged in earnest conversation, that is to say, Madame Marceau spoke, and Madame de Jussac put in a word now and then. The accident and its consequences, which had apparently extended much farther up the river, occupied them exclusively.

“Deplorable!” exclaimed Madame Marceau; “ten families ruined; we must, of course, do something for these people.”

“Are they Monsieur de Sainville’s tenants?” asked Madame de Jussac.

“No, they are not on our land; but we are not the less bound to come to their aid. Mademoiselle Montolieu, Madame de Jussac says you remained out; I hope you did not get wet. *Ma chère*,” she added, without waiting for Nathalie’s reply, “what do you say to a lottery?”

“Excellent!” was the calm answer.

“Excellent, as you say.” From that moment the idea of the lottery seemed to occupy her exclusively.

Madame de Jussac turned towards Nathalie, and quietly asked if she had remained out in the rain, and got very wet?

“Not very wet,” replied Nathalie, much disturbed.

It did not add to her composure, to perceive that Madame de Jussac’s slow, but attentive look was scanning her change of dress.

“ You must have found a convenient shelter,” she observed, in her languid way; “ I never saw such heavy rain: you were surely not out all the time?”

Nathalie bent over her work, without answering: indeed, Madame Marceau gave her no time to do so. Her own impression was, that Nathalie had kept away from the drawing-room through a very proper sense of discretion; where, and how she had spent that evening, was a minor point, in which she took not the least interest. She now engaged her inquisitive friend in so close a conversation on the proposed lottery; its probable results; the prizes to be drawn; the tickets to be placed, and other such questions, that Madame de Jussac had not the opportunity of renewing her inquiries.

About half an hour had elapsed, when the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. He took no notice of Nathalie, and sat at the end of the table farthest from that where she worked, near the two ladies. The ruined families, the lottery, and Madame de Jussac, were immediately forgotten for “ dear Armand, his heroism,” and so forth. “ Had he got wet? he must be chilly? — could nothing be done?”

Madame Marceau’s Armand heard her, and replied, with evident, though repressed impatience. Nathalie took a mischievous pleasure in noticing how he fretted internally beneath his sister’s praise, and the

word of quiet eulogy which Madame de Jussac put in now and then.

At length both ladies desisted; but first Madame Marceau adroitly dropped the word "lottery."

"A lottery—what for?" he promptly asked.

"For those poor ruined families, Armand." As she spoke, Madame Marceau looked anxiously at her brother. Nathalie, who had formerly heard him mention this not very elevated sort of charity in terms of contemptuous pity, expected some objection, but he only looked thoughtful, and said nothing.

"Yes," gaily continued his sister, interpreting his silence into approval; "a lottery we must have. Mademoiselle Nathalie,"—on hearing herself thus familiarly addressed, the young girl perceived that the lady was in high good humour; "Mademoiselle Nathalie, I claim a purse of your work, at the very least; you, *ma chère*, have already pledged yourself to the contribution of I know not how many charming things; my aunt must give us some *chef-d'œuvre* in the knitting way. Do not think to escape, Armand; you have brought back too many delightful curiosities from your wanderings, not to have a few to spare for the sake of charity."

"True; but I will give you a greater curiosity by far—good advice."

Madame Marceau coughed, and looked annoyed.

"Well, Armand," she said, with a constrained smile, "let us hear this good advice."

“ In the first place, how many tickets do you mean to issue ?”

“ Two or three thousand : less will not do.”

“ How will you dispose of them ?”

“ Madame de Jussac has very kindly offered to dispose of half the number issued.”

“ But how will you dispose of the other thousand or fifteen hundred ?”

Madame Marceau’s brow darkened : this was a sensitive point. She had been so long buried in *bourgeois* obscurity, and her brother cared so little for society, that her circle of acquaintance was as yet very narrow. This was a matter in which she could not think of imposing on Madame de Jussac, on whose lips she now detected a smile of careless triumph. Thanking her brother very little for this exposure, she coldly replied,

“ I really do not know.”

He smiled in a very provoking manner, as if rather pleased than otherwise at having thrown cold water on his sister’s schemes. Such, at least, was Nathalie’s charitable conclusion as she looked up from her work, and attentively watched his face. She sat rather in the shade, and he at the other end of the table, in the circle of light shed by the lamp.

“ We must have less tickets, I suppose,” said Madame Marceau, in a vexed tone.

“ Impossible,” quietly replied her brother ; “ the

damage done, as you say, is great. The produce of the lottery must be worth offering."

"Which means that I had better give it up," observed the lady, rather indignantly; "is that your 'good advice,' Armand?"

"By no means," he replied, smiling again; "I have only pointed out the difficulty; I am going to deliver you from it now. The lottery is evidently insufficient; but on the day when it is to take place, throw open the grounds to the good people of Sainville,—not the garden, for to that I have a decided objection. Give them a little *fête champêtre*, with a dance on the lawn; let the price of entrance not be too high,—*bourgeois* are sparing of their money. Many will come, and the produce of both fête and lottery will, I am sure, cover all the losses these poor people have sustained."

Madame Marceau heard her brother with a triumphant surprise she took great pains to conceal from the languid look of her friend. But, spite of all she could do, her haughty face was flushed, and her dark eyes kindled, as she listened to this solution of the difficulty. The sister of Monsieur de Sainville knew she could not be a political lady, on the legitimate side, at least, like Madame de Jussac, who guided all the intrigues of the district; for her friend was a Countess, and she was unfortunately the widow of a merchant; besides, her brother, through whom she might have been something, professed a profound

indifference for every political party. She could not be a graceful and accomplished lady of the world, for she had no high connexions, and would not stoop to second-rate ones. But she could be a popular lady, —the lady of Sainville. Abroad she had many rivals, but none at home, and like Cæsar, she loved where she did rule to rule alone. The suggestions of her brother fell on her ear like the realization of her long-cherished and ambitious dreams. She beheld the fête in anticipation; she saw herself the queen of the day, sailing through respectful crowds, polite to a select few, gracious to all, and patronizing *bourgeois* and shopkeepers to her haughty heart's content. Nay, she could not help remembering that the elections were at hand; if Armand would only consent to become a candidate, let himself be elected, and agree to take his seat as deputy? He could if he would; then why should he not? She fastened her dark, stealthy eyes on her brother, and eagerly scanned that face, so pale and severe, which ever seemed to baffle the scrutiny it irresistibly attracted. Why had he, who by no means professed himself to be a philanthropist, been so zealous in saving the paltry crops of still more paltry villagers? Why had he, who despised the surreptitious charity of lotteries, so readily agreed to hers? Why had he, who was so jealous of his privacy and solitude, offered to open his luxurious and carefully-guarded grounds to the prying gaze and obtrusive presence of paying guests? Why was all

this? Was it the result of some deep and secret scheme? Did he, who chose to appear so sceptical and so indifferent, long in his heart for political power,—that passion of man's noon-day life? She scarcely hoped so, and yet it would be strange indeed if he,—still in all the fulness and vigour of existence,—had not even a desire to fulfil or an aim to pursue. But, far as her thoughts had wandered, the cautious lady knew how to seem not to have for one instant forgotten the lottery and the proposed *fête*.

“Your advice is good, Armand,” she smilingly said, “but expensive.”

This objection was intended to blind Madame de Jussac, who was to conclude that her friend had been engaged in economical calculations. Monsieur de Sainville looked surprised.

“I dare say you will not mind either trouble or expense incurred for the sake of a good deed,” he replied.

“I see he is willing to pay, but will not appear in the matter,” she thought. “What if we have the *fête* without the dancing?” she again objected, now speaking aloud.

“By no means,” he very quickly said; “without the dancing! Why, Rosalie, half the people would not come.”

“Oh! proud brother of mine, you, too, have set your heart on popularity and power!” inwardly ex-

claimed Madame Marceau, looking at him with secret triumph, and already beholding herself in Paris, the centre of a political coterie in her brother's hôtel, whilst Charles went off as attaché d'ambassade with his Excellency, no matter who.

“I give in,” she said aloud, as if she had all this time been engaged in some economical struggle; “and sincerely thank my dear brother for his judicious advice.”

“Then I shall test your gratitude,” he replied, “by requesting that you will take on yourself the sole management of everything, and for once allow me to drop the character of host and become your guest.”

Madame Marceau dilated with triumph.

The struggle had been long; but her brother acknowledged her power; there was sweetness in this tardy victory. She felt happy, elated, and glanced with secret exultation at Madame de Jussac, who, in her placid way, had already chosen to drop a few hints concerning Monsieur de Sainville's singular strength of character. But the lady was not at that moment looking towards her; she was amusing herself with watching Nathalie, opposite whom her sofa lay. On the first mention of the fête, the young girl had laid down her work on her lap and listened attentively: but, as the discussion continued, and the plan matured, she gradually and unconsciously edged her chair round so as

to face the speakers. Now she was sitting with both her arms resting and folded on the table, half-bent forward with eager look and parted lips, in an attitude of breathless attention.

“I know who will dance at the fête,” said Madame de Jussac, with a smile, thus drawing attention to the young girl.

Nathalie, who had remained wholly unconscious of observation, started, coloured, hung down her head, and pretended to be looking for her work. Vain attempt at composure! When she looked up, her face was radiant, her eyes danced with delight, and irrepressible smiles played around her demurely closed lips.

“Do you care about dancing?” asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking at her for the first time since his entrance.

“Yes, sir, I like it,” she replied, a little mortified to find he had so soon forgotten their conversation in the hermitage.

“Then I promise you that you shall not miss one quadrille,” observed Madame Marceau, now in her most amiable mood. “Come, *ma chère*, when shall it be?”

Madame de Jussac, thus addressed, replied calmly; but her friend was in high spirits, and went on arranging and projecting for an hour and more. Then, however, a sudden silence fell on the whole party. Monsieur de Sainville looked grave, almost moody;

Madame Marceau thought him absorbed by the coming meeting, and she already revelled in the imagined triumphs of the *grande dame populaire*, and of the political woman. Nathalie worked on in silence, and looked very serious, but all the time a bright vision floated before her: she saw a gay dance on the green; she heard the merry music—merry even to those who care little for dancing—of galop, waltz, and quadrille. Madame de Jussac looked on through her half-closed eyes, and drew her own conclusions from all she saw, until the party separated at a later hour than usual.

The week which this lady spent at the château was not productive in incident. Madame Marceau, though affecting familiarity, and calling her *ma chère*, *ma bonne*, and *ma belle*, to show that they were old friends—they had known one another in childhood—was in evident awe of her quiet guest, and submitted to all her opinions and decisions in matters of worldly knowledge. Aunt Radegonde, without speaking too openly, gave broad hints to Nathalie about people who made one feel chill and uncomfortable. Monsieur de Sainville looked more cold and haughty than he had ever looked.

Nathalie soon noticed a tacit sort of quarrel was continually going on between him and his sister's friend. At first, the lady enveloped him in a soft silken net of the most subtle courtesy and grace. It was flattery so delicate, that no man could pos-

sibly resent it, and then succeeded a constant instinctive sort of appealing to his opinion and judgment, that was far more flattering than mere speech; but in an unlucky hour Madame de Jussac said something about politics, and confessed the warm interest she felt in the elder Bourbons. Nathalie saw Monsieur de Sainville smile, as if he now understood why he had been so perseveringly courted, and from that moment the quarrel began. Of course, it was a polite, well-bred, smiling quarrel; politics formed the ostensible theme, but perhaps politics had in reality little to do with it. There might be such a thing as piqued *amour-propre* on one side, and ironical resentment on the other.

It was, perhaps, for the charitable purpose of punishing Monsieur de Sainville, who now scarcely noticed the young girl, that Madame de Jussac suddenly took a great fancy to her, and almost exclusively engaged her company; he certainly did not appear to view their intimacy with pleasure; but Nathalie, piqued at his coldness, did not care. She was young, frank as her years, and she yielded freely to the insinuating grace which no one knew better how to exercise than Madame de Jussac.

At the end of a week the lady left, promising to come back for the *féte*. After her departure, matters resumed their old course at the château. Madame Marceau moved about once more with authori-

tative air and speech; Aunt Radegonde was garrulous and cheerful; and Nathalie felt that the change gradually vanished from the manner of Monsieur de Sainville.

CHAPTER III.

FOR the next fortnight, the château was kept in a constant state of bustle and preparation by Madame Marceau de Sainville, as she now began to be called. The little town echoed with her praises, and the rumour of her charity and munificence spread wherever the tidings of the disaster, which she thus generously sought to repair, had penetrated.

Whilst she disposed of tickets, gave orders, made purchases, and saw to everything, Nathalie and the Canoness worked together in the boudoir or in the garden. Aunt Radegonde, in her zeal, nearly knitted herself ill; Nathalie was fully as industrious. This busy fortnight, with its day of pleasure still in view, delighted her. The time passed lightly. At night, she dreamt of endless dancing on the lawn; and all day long she worked at various articles of fancy work, destined for the lottery, and of which Madame Mar-

ceau provided the materials. To the annoyance of his aunt, "who, not being inquisitive, would not have given a pin to know," Monsieur de Sainville declined exhibiting his contributions to the general fund, and took it on himself to criticize very freely the various articles manufactured by his aunt and Nathalie. He said the flimsy counterpane could give no warmth; censured the cobweb mittens; pronounced the opera-caps unbecoming; and so much irritated the little Canoness, that she told him roundly "he could not do so much, were he to try ever so long,"—a fact he willingly granted. Nathalie's productions fared still worse. He held up her embroidered bag to ridicule; declared that her cigar-case was such as no man of sense would use; but chiefly derided a little round silk purse, with a silver clasp, which she was knitting, and which was destined to hold a Napoleon, or the change of one. This he declared it could not. Nathalie, piqued in her *amour-propre*, insisted that it could. The contest lasted until the purse was finished; her host then tested its merits, in the presence of Nathalie, to whose indelible disgrace it was found totally deficient. Aunt Radegonde warmly took the part of her young friend, who, as she always said, "was too meek, poor little thing! to defend herself properly;" an assertion which, though too polite to contradict, her nephew always heard with his sceptical smile.

At length the great day came, and a lovely day it

was,—clear, bright, and sunny. The grounds were not to be thrown open until three in the afternoon ; and at three precisely, Nathalie ran down to the drawing-room to find the Canoness, whom she had vainly sought for in her boudoir. She opened and closed the door with a sort of unnecessary vivacity, which characterized her least motions, and came running in, exclaiming, in a light, cheerful voice :

“ Are you here, Marraine ? I am quite ready.”

She looked around : the Canoness was sitting in her arm-chair, dressed in grey silk, and with a profusion of rich laces, that gave costliness to her otherwise simple attire. She eyed the young girl from head to foot with a critical glance, and smiled approvingly. Nathalie was, however, very simply dressed in a clear white muslin, whose light folds fell down to her feet ; a black lace mantilla, worn at the back of her head, and falling down on her neck, and black net mittens, half-covering her bare arms, gave her something of a Spanish air. The Canoness, pleased to see her looking so well, completed her costume by presenting her with an elegant little fan, to be worn suspended at the wrist by a slender jet chain.

“ Do you know how to use it ?” she asked, helping her to fasten it on.

Nathalie began fanning herself with assumed awkwardness.

“ No, Petite, not so ;—look at me ;” and taking

her own fan, she used it with slow and stately grace; for Aunt Radegonde, having lived in the days when fanning was in all its glory, piqued herself on possessing the traditions of that well-nigh lost art.

“ Yes, it is already better,” she added, as Nathalie made another attempt; “ but you do it too fast—try again; walk up and down the room, fan yourself, and look as Spanish as you can.”

Nathalie laughed, and complied. She paced the drawing-room to and fro, assuming that peculiar gait which is said to characterize the women of Spain, and fanning herself with southern ease and vivacity. As every now and then she glanced over her shoulder at the Canoness, with half-mocking, half-alluring grace, she looked like one of those lovely, but far too earthly saints, such as the old Spanish masters delighted to paint from living models, suddenly stepped down, in all the warm colouring and vividness of life, from her gloomy canvas and tarnished frame, to bewitch poor mortals from their devotions. All this she did with the coquetry innate in southern women, a coquetry nothing can subdue—most provoking and yet ever irresistible, because frank, genuine, and without disguise. But Nathalie suddenly stopped short in her promenading; she dropped her fan—it would have fallen to the floor, but for the little jet chain—and looked transfixed. She had perceived Monsieur de Sainville, unseen till then, stand-

ing in the embrasure of one of the windows, with a newspaper in his hand ; he seemed absorbed in his reading ; probably he had not noticed her--she devoutly hoped so, on remembering how freely she had been displaying her graces. She gave the Canoness a look of silent reproach.

“ Petite,” suddenly asked Aunt Radegonde, without heeding this, “ why do you not wear the velvet I gave you ?”

“ I have lost it,” was the embarrassed reply.

“ Lost it ! When, and how ?”

“ Out—on the day of the storm.”

“ Petite, how could the storm make you lose it ?”

“ My hair got wet, and I unfastened it.”

“ Unfastened your hair in the storm !”

“ Was there a silver edging to it ?” asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking up.

“ Yes ; did you find it, Armand ?”

“ I found such a velvet.”

“ Where ?” asked his inquisitive aunt.

Nathalie gave him an alarmed look. She knew where the velvet was lost—where she had uselessly looked for it. He smiled, and said, quietly :

“ Aunt, I fear you will be angry, when I tell you that I have been using your gift to Mademoiselle Montolieu as a book-marker, and that the silver has become tarnished.”

“ Using Petite’s velvet as a book-marker !” indignantly exclaimed his aunt.

“ Well, if Mademoiselle Montolieu wishes for it——”

“ Do you imagine she is going to wear your book-marker?” hotly interrupted the Canoness.

“ Aunt, I hear the music.”

“ And you want us to leave you to your politics?” she pettishly said.

He silently resumed his reading as they left the room

“ Oh, Marraine!” reproachfully observed Nathalie in the garden, “ how could you make me go on so foolishly whilst Monsieur de Sainville was there?”

“ You surely do not think he took any notice of you?” replied the Canoness, innocently looking up into her face.

“ Well, but he might,” answered Nathalie, colouring a little.

“ Petite, Armand is courteous to women, as a gentleman should be; but though he notices character, I acquit him of caring for either the dress or good looks of young girls. See, how he never knew that velvet to be yours! *A-propos*, where did you lose it?”

But they had crossed the garden, and were entering the grounds, which were already filled with guests, laughing, mirth, and music. Nathalie took advantage of this not to reply.

“ *Oh! mon Dieu!* what a pretty sight!” she exclaimed, looking and feeling delighted. “ How gay

and cheerful those many-coloured dresses look on the green ! What a lovely afternoon ! Why is there not a fête every day in the year ? It is so pleasant to enjoy oneself and be happy."

" Petite, what are those white things there beyond ?"

" Awnings, Marraine, — snow - white awnings, spreading in the cool green shade, with here and there a warm sun-ray gliding through. That little tent standing apart is for the refreshments. I ran out just before they opened the gates, to have a peep : it looked beautiful. Fruits, in all their bloom and beauty, and of every warm, sunny hue, rose in pyramids, in wide porcelain baskets, and looked almost too fresh and exquisite to touch."

" Were there any cakes or creams ?" asked the Canoness, who had a spice of *gourmandise* in her composition.

" I did not mind. Cakes and creams are pretty, but not poetical."

" They are a great deal better than poetical. Was there any nougât ? I like it. Let us try at once before it is all gone. Come, Petite," she added, with an air of *finesse*, " let us go to that pretty tent, take some nougât and a cream, and eat them in some quiet, shady place, far from all this noise and bustle."

Nathalie gave a wistful look at the dancers under the large awning ; but there was nothing selfish, even

in her most ardent longing after pleasure, and, without a murmur, she accompanied her old friend.

All the *bourgeois* of Sainville and the environs had come, with their wives and daughters, to see the grounds, to criticize what they saw, and enjoy themselves, in spite of all that. There were also a few ladies from the surrounding châteaux, and plenty of gentlemen, who thought the young *bourgeoises* very pretty, though somewhat prim and sedate.

The place was thronged ; yet, thanks to the admirable instinct of French crowds, there was not the least confusion. Nathalie and her companion kept somewhat aloof, and followed a shady path, whence they could see all that passed on the lawn. The young girl several times caught a view of Madame Marceau, who sailed through the crowd with majestic grace, with a smile for some, a word to others, and to all kind glances. She felt elated, triumphant ; and looked like a dark, handsome queen, imperious even in her very blandest courtesy. Nathalie could not help admiring her, and observing to her companion that Madame Marceau was a very fine woman.

“ Rather too tall,” replied the Canoness. “ After all, my dear, it is we, and those like us, that are *the* women.”

Nathalie smiled archly. She was of that elegant height to which there is nothing to add, but from which there is also nothing to take away. Aunt Radegonde, though decidedly short, laboured under the agreeable

delusion that her height was the standard height of woman, and used the pronoun *we* with perfect confidence. They soon reached the tent. The Canoness selected her favourite dainties, and made a servant follow them with a tray, until they reached a cool, shady nook, where they sat down at the foot of a beech, and began, as she said, “to enjoy themselves.” Nathalie consoled herself by listening to the music, and now and then catching a glimpse of the dancers through the trees.

The Canoness liked to enjoy good things slowly. She was long about the nougât, and longer still about the creams. Though Nathalie remained patient and cheerful, she could not help giving an occasional look at the distant fête, and drawing to it the attention of Aunt Radegonde.

“ Oh ! Marraine !” she exclaimed, admiringly ; “ do look at those dancers there beyond. How well they keep time to the music, and sink or rise together ! Dancing is beautiful ; I admire it ; I have always admired it ; there is something in it that reminds one of astronomy.”

“ Astronomy, Petite ?”

“ Yes, indeed, for I half believe in the music of the spheres ; and the harmonious motion of sun, earth, moon, and planets, with their myriads of worlds, always seemed to me like a magnificent dance on a grand scale. Comets are those erratic dancers whom neither time nor measure can keep quiet, and fixed

stars are holy nuns, who have looked on from afar, and who, poor things! must still look on, throughout eternity."

"Well, Petite, you will be no fixed star by-and-by. But is it not pleasant to be sitting here in the shade, enjoying our little collation?"

Too candid to say "yes," Nathalie smiled, and the Canoness, who had some of the latent selfishness which often accompanies a certain species of good-nature, interpreted the smile as one of unequivocal assent. Their "little collation" was over, but she felt "meditative;" and in her vocabulary, to be meditative signified to be drowsy. They were sitting on a grassy slope at the foot of a large beech; she drew nearer to the trunk of the tree and leaning against it prepared to meditate. At first Nathalie felt dismayed. She knew that the reflective moods of Aunt Radegonde were long and deep; but it seemed a hopeless case; and so, with a sigh given to the distant dancing, she sat down by her old friend, smoothed and settled her silk skirts, and encircling her little waist with one arm, told her to take her shoulder as a pillow. After some coquetting, the Canoness accepted, and laid her head on the firm and smooth support offered to her; she looked flushed, and complained of the heat; Nathalie began fanning her softly; in less than a minute Aunt Radegonde was fast asleep.

This spot, though not far from the lawn, was both

shady and retired, and no one came to disturb the two ladies. But after some minutes had elapsed a gentleman slowly walked up the quiet path and paused, unseen and unheard, within a few paces of the beech-tree. The Canoness still slept peacefully, but her head had half-glided from the shoulder to the bosom of the young girl, who, to support her more conveniently, now leaned on one elbow, and half reclined on the grassy slope. She still fanned her old friend, but slowly and abstractedly ; it was evident that her thoughts were elsewhere ; every now and then she started slightly as the sounds of the fête reached her ear, and her right foot, half peeping from the ample folds of her white dress, beat time to the distant music. As they both lay there together, in the cool, shady light, with many a queer depth and many a winding path around and behind them, he who gazed remembered a long-forgotten tale of his childhood, and thought that Nathalie looked not unlike the poor Princess sighing for freedom with all its joys, whilst the Canoness answered to the loving but jealous little fairy, who still kept her bound to her side by some strange magic spell.

“ Mademoiselle Nathalie,” said Monsieur de Sainville, for it was he, “ I thought you liked dancing ?”

Nathalie looked up, coloured a little, and raising herself without awakening the Canoness, replied, with slight embarrassment, “ that she liked it,” and stooping over Aunt Radegonde, she fanned her assi-

duously. He leaned against a neighbouring tree, and began talking to her. Several times he glanced impatiently at his aunt, and once proposed to waken her. Nathalie refused, philosophically declaring “she did not care about the dancing.” He smiled, and began teasing her pitilessly. Now he said, how merry the people looked as he passed through them; then he made her listen to the music, or gravely requested her to explain the various figures of the dance.

“Confess,” he said, at length, bending forward to see her averted face, “confess you wish my aunt would awaken?”

“She was sure she did not care a bit;” but in her vexation she fanned the Canoness very fast.

“*Mon Dieu!* what a breeze!” exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, with a sudden start.

Nathalie looked confused; but he was not minding her.

“Aunt,” he seriously said, “how could you be so unkind as to deprive Mademoiselle Montolieu of the dancing, when she is so fond of it?”

The conscience of Aunt Radegonde already upbraided her, and she took this remark very ill. With a certain perverseness of judgment, in which she sometimes indulged, she now affected to consider everything her nephew said as an offence, not to herself, but to Nathalie, whom she defended with angry warmth.

“ Do not meddle with Petite, Armand ; she is nothing to you.”

“ I beg your pardon, she is my ward.”

“ Your ward !”

“ Yes, indeed, my ward.”

“ Armand, take my advice, do not meddle with young girls—you are not always kind to them ; and you, Petite, do not mind him, he only wants to make us quarrel : do not mind him, but kiss me.”

She stopped short in the path,—for they were going towards the lawn—as she spoke, and giving an indignant look at her nephew, she turned towards the young girl, who was preparing to comply with a smile, when Monsieur de Sainville quietly stepped between her and his aunt, took her arm within his, and stooping composedly, laid his moustache on the cheek Aunt Radegonde had destined to the rosy lips of Nathalie.”

“ Aunt,” said he, with a smile, “ the quarrel is not between you and Petite”—the word seemed to slip out unawares,—“ but between you and me ; and we must not quarrel to-day.”

A genuine caress from her nephew was so rare, that the Canoness was immediately pacified. They soon reached the scene of the fête, and Monsieur de Sainville, though not without much trouble and seeking on his part, found them convenient places. There neither loud music, nor crowding dances could give annoyance; there the awning and sheltering trees

over head yielded its deepest shade ; and there, too, —not the least important point for Nathalie,—the ladies could not only see the dancing, but be seen themselves. No sooner were they seated, than numerous gentlemen gathered around Monsieur de Sainville, who remained standing near them ; and invitations poured thick and fast on the pretty girl who sat by his aunt. Every time she wrote down on her fan the name of a new partner, Nathalie could not refrain from giving her host a triumphant smile, destined to avenge her of all she had endured beneath the beech-tree.

Dancing may be delightful, but it is neither amusing to look at, nor interesting to describe, unless in extraordinary cases. We shall not, therefore, expatiate on the dancing which afforded Nathalie so much delight, that every now and then, in the midst of her enjoyment, she could not help, like an amused child, looking over her shoulder towards the spot where she had left her old friend, upon which Aunt Radegonde never failed to give her an encouraging nod ; and her nephew sometimes paused, in a conversation, to catch her look and smile. The first time, however, that she returned to her seat, the Canoness seriously advised her to dance with less spirit and vivacity, “ to do it more composedly, in short.”

“ I cannot,” laughingly replied the young girl.

Here she felt some one stooping over her chair, and a kind voice whispered in her ear :

“Do not try; but enjoy yourself as much as you can, my child.”

“What are you saying to her, Armand?” asked the Canoness.

Nathalie looked up, but he was gone.

The next time that Nathalie returned to the prudent Aunt Radegonde, she found her engaged in a close conversation with no less a personage than the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville. The Chevalier had the compassionate nature of the sex he adored; he had taken three tickets for the lottery, and purchased a card of admission to the fête. No one, who now saw him with snow-white cravat, diamond pin, and, above all, with an air so gallant and *dégagé*, could have suspected that these acts of munificence entailed a week’s pinching economy on the kind-hearted dancing-master. He cared little, so long as appearances—modern honour—were saved. Amongst the dancers were some of his pupils; he wished to watch their progress, and encourage their efforts by his presence. He did not intend dancing himself: he did not think it fair. He felt in the case of a fencing-master, who cannot fight a duel, with his own weapons at least. Unable to obtain a front seat, he placed himself behind the Canoness; he was not tall, and she was short, which made it convenient. But at the moment when he was most intent in looking over her head, a tall gentleman, passing by with hasty strides, pushed him rather rudely. Aunt Rade-

gonde gave a little scream: the Chevalier remained aghast. He had been pushed, and pushed against a lady! His first impulse—for he was an irascible little man—was to rush after the tall gentleman, and chastise him on the instant; but a gentler feeling prevailed: he remained near the Canoness, who graciously assured him she was not hurt. “He feared this assurance proceeded only from her extreme goodness;” and, as he spoke, he gave the tall gentleman a look that said so plainly, “We shall meet again, sir,” that the Canoness, knowing to what dreadful extremities gentlemen jealous of their honour sometimes allowed themselves to be carried, and who, from the ribbon at his button-hole, took the dancing-master for an officer retired from active service, became much alarmed, and exerted herself to soothe his ruffled spirit. Need we say that the tall gentleman, who always remained unconscious of the offence he had committed, and the risk he had run, was forgotten for the fascinating Canoness. Their innocent flirtation had reached its highest point of flowery speech on one hand, and of graceful complaisance on the other. In a moment of *entraînement*, the Chevalier had even forgotten his scruples so far as to solicit the Canoness to favour him with a contre-danse, and she had declined on the score of being a Canoness; for, though some Canonesses did dance, she could not approve of it, when Nathalie came up, and greeted her old friend with smiling welcome.

This recognition led to an increase of harmony, flowery speeches, and general pleasantness. The Chevalier made tender inquiries and gave minute information. Moral and intellectual cares weighed heavily on Mademoiselle Dantin, but strength of principle supported her through all. Nathalie, who felt happy and forgiving, smiled, and said she was glad to hear it. Days of pleasure pass rapidly; and when she saw the sun sinking in the west, and the dancers and groups on the lawn thinning gradually, this day seemed to the young girl to have been as brief and delightful as a dream. The Canoness, in whose monotonous existence the episode with the Chevalier formed a very agreeable incident, was beholding with equal regret the approach of evening, when a cold haughty voice observed by her side :

“Aunt, is it not growing cool?”

She looked round, and beheld her imperious niece; but the presence of strangers always infused a strong spirit of independence in Aunt Radegonde, who now quietly replied :

“Cool! Rosalie; I think it close;” and she fanned herself very coolly.

Madame Marceau gave her an astonished look; but she blandly said :

“My dear aunt, it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you in private.”

“I cannot leave Petite.”

“Aunt,” observed Madame Marceau, with her grandest air, “Mademoiselle Montolieu, or, indeed, any lady, is sufficiently protected by the mere fact of being here—the place is her shield.”

The Canoness rose, but she still looked uncomfortable; the polite Chevalier partly relieved her, by promising to remain at Mademoiselle Montolieu’s orders, in return for which, he received her warm thanks, and one of Madame Marceau’s coolest glances.

When Nathalie returned to her seat, she found Madame Marceau waiting for her; her dark face now wore a look of secret triumph. Without giving the Chevalier time to speak, she said, in her most caressing tone:

“You must be tired, Petite; do come and rest, before dinner.”

She drew the arm of the young girl within her own, and led her away to the spot where a raised bench, standing beneath a separate awning, had occasionally received her during the course of the day. Madame de Jussac, who had only just arrived, half lay at one end of the seat, fanning herself with her air of well-bred *ennui*; she welcomed Nathalie very graciously, and made room for her by her side. Madame Marceau sat down at the other end of the bench.

“Have you been amused?” softly asked Madame de Jussac.

“ Oh ! very much indeed,” replied Nathalie, with the glow of pleasure still on her cheek.

“ How well this Spanish sort of thing becomes you !” admiringly said Madame Marceau ; “ does it not, *ma chère* ?”

“ Before this evening, I never thought I could like the Spanish mantilla,” quietly replied Madame de Jussac.

The young girl coloured, and looked wonderingly from one to the other lady. Madame Marceau gave her an approving nod ; Madame de Jussac smiled blandly, and her look said, “ Yes, indeed, you are very charming.”

“ You like dancing ?” she observed aloud.

“ I love it !” replied Nathalie with sparkling eyes.

“ And when will you have another dance in this dull place, miserably dull for you !” sighed Madame Marceau.

“ Miserably dull, madame ! Never since I left Provence have I been so happy, so free from care, as here !”

“ What a negative happiness ?” kindly objected Madame Marceau. “ In the summer Sainville can do, but in the winter ! Just imagine, *ma bonne*,” she added, addressing Madame de Jussac across Nathalie ; “ no society, nothing but newspapers, walks--when there is neither snow, rain, nor wind ; an odd game of piquet with my aunt, and my silent brother walk-

ing up and down the drawing-room, evening after evening."

"Lamentable!" said Madame de Jussac, yawning slightly.

"I should like it," quietly observed Nathalie.

"Like it!" sharply echoed Madame Marceau.

"Yes, is there not a dreamy charm, or soothing repose in such a life?"

"I beg your pardon; I thought you liked pleasure?"

"Whilst it lasts! but to-morrow this place will seem empty; I shall miss the dance,—the music,—the faces,—the excitement."

"And pleasures should succeed one another too rapidly for reaction to have time to come. Quite the opinion of Madame de Méris, who will never allow this depressing reaction to come near you or her daughters."

Madame de Jussac spoke very quietly, but Nathalie fastened on her a look of such perfect astonishment, that the lady opened her own fine blue eyes very wide, and half raising herself up, exclaimed with something approaching vivacity:

"Is this an indiscretion? It is your fault, Rosalie," she added, reproachfully glancing at her friend, "you should have checked me. *Ma foi, tant pis pour vous.*" She sank back into her old attitude with indolent and careless grace.

What did all this mean? Nathalie turned towards

Madame Marceau: it was getting dark, but their looks met.

“Yes,” she calmly said, “you have been a little indiscreet, *ma bonne*; but the mischief done is slight. You must know, my dear child,” she added, taking and softly pressing Nathalie’s hand, “that we do not think the mere fact of having you here, is a sufficient compensation for the painful past. No, we do not think so. More is due to you. Now it very fortunately happens, that the Marquise de Mérис has asked her sister-in-law, Madame de Jussac, to find for her daughters—a companion, not a guide or governess, of their own age and temper; one is seventeen; the other eighteen; they are very gay, high-spirited girls. You will do admirably. Your sole task, my dear, will be to amuse yourself as well as you can; a task that becomes you charmingly. I do not speak of the other matters: suffice it to say, that Madame de Mérис has a princely fortune, and spends it with princely grace. I need not say how grieved we are at parting with you, but we sacrifice our own feelings to your good. The manner in which you enjoyed this solitary day of pleasure proves to us that it would be cruel and selfish to detain you here. We will not do so. You will see Madame de Mérис at dinner this evening. She spends the night here, and is so anxious to have you, that she talks of taking you away with her to-morrow. But I scarcely think we can spare you so soon.” She spoke quite affectionately. A slight nervous tremour shook

the hand which she still held, but the young girl never opened her lips.

“ Do you know that Madame de Mérис has taken a box at both Operas?” carelessly said Madame de Jussac.

“ Indeed !” observed Madame Marceau, “ she is fond of music ?”

“ Passionately !”

“ How fortunate ! Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly.”

“ Fortunate, indeed ! Eliza gives such exquisite little amateur concerts. But perhaps mademoiselle’s voice is a soprano ?” she added in a tone of apprehension.

“ No ! it is a very fine contralto voice.”

Madame de Jussac was delighted. A soprano voice would have been good ; but a contralto was invaluable. Madame de Mérис had been longing for a contralto. After dwelling a little longer on this topic, the conversation took another turn ; the balls which Madame de Mérис gave, those to which she went, and to which Nathalie would of course accompany her and her daughters ; the company they received,—the delightful Tuesdays they had,—the magnificent châteaux they possessed in various provinces,—the splendid and luxurious life they led, were all carelessly mentioned in turn. And as Madame de Jussac explained, Madame Marceau admired, and Nathalie sat pale and silent between both.

“ So Madame de Mérис is as gay as ever,” quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville, who, whilst they were thus engaged, had come up, unperceived, and now joined in the conversation.

There was a brief pause. Nathalie started slightly, and looked up. Madame Marceau cast a rapid and anxious look at her brother; he stood facing her at the other end of the seat, partly leaning over the indolent Madame de Jussac, who merely turned up her eyes, to observe, languidly:

“ Does the fan annoy you?”

“ Not in the least.”

“ Ah! I am glad of it.” She resumed her favourite occupation, one moment interrupted.

The heart of Nathalie was beating fast; her colour came and went; she trembled visibly. It was well for her that evening was closing in; but the two ladies, between whom she sat, might have braved the light of sun or lamp. The pride of the one, the composure of the other, defied scrutiny.

“ So Madame de Mérис is as gay as ever?” again said Monsieur de Sainville, speaking in precisely the same tone as before.

Madame de Jussac smiled assent.

“ You will like her so much, *chère Petite*,” calmly observed Madame Marceau, turning to Nathalie.

“ Then when she said *we*, she meant that he knew and approved this,” thought Nathalie; whilst a keen pang shot through her heart.

“She means to spend this winter in Paris, I believe?” he quietly continued.

“Yes, in Paris,” replied Madame de Jussac, with perfect tranquillity.

“What a delightful change for you, Petite,—from dull Sainville to gay Paris!” exclaimed Madame Marceau.

Nathalie did not reply.

“Are you fond of change?” asked Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie made an effort to reply that she liked change very much.

“Then I suppose you will be glad to see Paris?” he continued.

She supposed so.

“How very provoking!” he resumed, with his peculiar smile. “I am grieved to be the bearer of painful tidings; but it is unfortunately too true that you will not see Paris this winter.”

“What! Is not Madame de Méris going?” asked Madame Marceau, thrown off her guard.

“Yes, I believe she is going,” was the calm reply.

“Then why may not Mademoiselle Montolieu see Paris this winter?” inquired his sister once more, quite composed.

“Because Mademoiselle Montolieu will spend this winter at Sainville.”

“You wish it!” exclaimed Madame Marceau, with a fiery look in the direction of Nathalie.

“ I protest against Mademoiselle Montolieu having any voice in this matter,” said Monsieur de Sainville, with provoking composure. “ What chance has our dull home against the syren city? Besides, being an interested party, she has no right to decide in her own case.”

“ Then you are judge in this matter!” bitterly remarked Madame Marceau, applying her vinaigrette as she spoke: “ Judge and jury.”

“ No; I merely represent my aunt, who bids Mademoiselle Montolieu leave at her peril.”

Madame Marceau indignantly fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

“ My aunt agreed a while ago,” she said, shortly.

“ Yes; but she has changed her mind since.”

“ She will reconsider the matter, Armand.”

“ I do not think so.”

“ My aunt is not so selfish as to wish to immure Mademoiselle Montolieu in this dull place.”

“ Selfishness is so ingenious! My aunt persists in declaring that Mademoiselle Montolieu prefers Sainville to Paris.”

“ Armand!” exclaimed Madame Marceau, in a tone of stately surprise, “ you cannot mean to say our aunt dreams of detaining Mademoiselle Montolieu against her will?”

Without answering his sister, Monsieur de Sainville turned towards Nathalie, and remarked, in his tranquil way:

“ Do not trust to the delusive hopes my sister holds out. My aunt declares you have passed your word to spend the winter here with her; she leaves you no other alternative, save to remain, or break your word by going. As to changing her fixed resolve, it is out of the question;—we are a wilful race?”

Nathalie looked up, and as she did so, she detected the glance which passed between Madame Marceau and her brother—angry confusion on her side; calm, inflexible will, on his. All this tacit plotting, counter-plotting, and polite quarrelling, was so much out of the young girl’s way, so foreign to anything which had yet come within her experience, that she knew not how to act. She had not the patience and worldly knowledge that can guide safely through the treacherous breakers of undefined conventionalities, and fearful of compromising her dignity and her pride, she had for once the wisdom and prudence to remain silent.

“ Armand,” observed Madame Marceau, after a pause, and now speaking very calmly, “ has my aunt reflected that Madame de Méris has also a claim over Mademoiselle Montolieu—that she will be hurt, and, above all, deeply disappointed?”

“ Be quite easy, Rosalie,” replied her brother, with slight irony; “ I took it on myself to break the matter to Madame de Méris; and I am happy to say she bore the painful tidings with all the fortitude of a woman of the world.”

“ How cool it is getting,” said Madame de Jussac, with a shiver. “ Monsieur de Sainville, will you be kind enough to let me take your arm? ”

She rose as she spoke: he silently complied with the lady’s request. Nathalie watched them walking away with a beating heart. Madame Marceau still sat near her. She was an imperious lady; her will had been thwarted; what would she not say, in her anger? She said nothing, but watched the figures of her brother and Madame de Jussac, as they slowly vanished in the winding path they had taken. When they were no longer to be seen, she rose, with majestic pride, wrapped her fine figure in her magnificent shawl, and brushed past the young girl, in haughty silence. Nathalie remained alone. She felt this slight more keenly perhaps than anything else; she could forgive the scheme for sending her away—the proud lady did not know how little she cared for her son—but to punish and slight her because that scheme happened to be defeated, was cruel and ungenerous. She had suffered acutely during the last half-hour, and bowing her face in her hands, she now wept silently. A sound near her made her raise her head; she looked up, and saw Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned, and now sat down by her side.

CHAPTER IV.

“ You are weeping,” said he ; “ why so?”

“ I am not weeping,” she replied, with slight equivocation.

“ But you were: the tears are still on your cheek. Why is this? No reply ! I will tell you why you weep: it is because you feel you have not been well used ; and, indeed, you have not.”

Nathalie looked at him. His face was severe, but she felt its severity was not for her.

“ My poor child,” he resumed, speaking very kindly, “ do not take this to heart; if my sister knew even what I know, she would not act thus. I once mentioned her views to you, and I told her what you told me ; but I perceive she labours under the impression, that no woman in her senses can remain indifferent to the love and admiration of her son.”

Nathalie smiled scornfully; he saw it, and continued:

“Without knowing the exact state of your feelings, I am, nevertheless, inclined to believe her mistaken.”

There was a pause; Nathalie did not speak.

“Mademoiselle Montolieu,” he said, very seriously, “have you a great objection to tell me what you refused to tell Charles the other evening: namely, what you feel for him?”

She seemed to hesitate.

“I will tell you,” she said, at length, “if I may be quite frank.”

“As frank as you wish: it is your friend, not the uncle of Charles, who listens.”

“Sir,” she resumed, “your nephew is handsome, I do not deny it; there is talent in his face. I believe him clever; as your nephew, he is much higher in station than any man who will ever think of marrying me: he probably will have much wealth, and if he has persecuted me with his attentions, I cannot but confess to myself, that it must be because he is much in love —”

She stopped short, and coloured deeply, as he who looked could see, in spite of the obscurity.

“Well?” he said, with his look still full on her face.

“You will not think what I am going to tell you strange?” she asked, hesitatingly.

“Strange!” he echoed, a little sadly; “my poor child, in those matters I think nothing strange.”

“Well, then,” she rejoined, pressing her right hand to her heart, and speaking very earnestly, “I feel here in a manner I understand very well, but cannot explain, that I shall never love, or even like him.”

There was a pause.

“Why so?” he at length asked.

“Because, without imputing evil to him, I do not think him good.”

“My dear child, are you so romantic as to expect perfection?”

“No; for I am far from being perfect myself.”

“Besides,” he continued, very seriously, “remember this great truth--the being who loves, is certainly, for the time that he or she loves, good.”

“Sir,” said Nathalie, quite as seriously, “do you think that Monsieur Marceau feels anything like genuine tenderness or affection for me? Do you think that, if I had the small-pox, for instance, he would ever care to see me again? Because, if you think so,” she added, after a brief pause, “I do not.”

He said nothing: he was secretly wondering at the intuitive, but unerring tact with which this seemingly heedless girl had arrived at the distinction between passion and tenderness.

“I thank you truly for your frankness and confidence,” he observed at length. “If I asked this

question, it was, with your permission, to satisfy my sister, without telling her that which it would hurt her maternal feelings to hear,—that her fears were wholly groundless."

" You may do, sir, as you wish."

" And you will spend the winter here?"

She shook her head gravely.

" No, sir; I have had too clear a proof to-night of what I suspected, before I had been two days here—namely, that I was not in the house of Madame Marceau, but in that of Monsieur de Sainville; not with her will, but through his."

" And is Mademoiselle Montolieu too proud to allow Monsieur de Sainville the pleasure of considering her his guest?" he asked very kindly.

" Oh, no; not too proud," replied the poor girl, with tears in her eyes and in her voice; " it is not fair to call that pride."

She was evidently much depressed. Her head drooped on her bosom, her hands lay clasped upon her lap; she looked pale in the light of the rising moon. There was sadness even in her attitude. He remembered her in the joyous mood of the afternoon, gay, smiling, and bright; with her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed from the excitement of the dance: the contrast pained him.

" What is it then?" he asked soothingly.

" The sense of my own dignity, which I am alone to guard," she firmly replied, looking up.

“ I respect your scruples ; but if my sister, herself, asks you to stay, will you not do so ?”

Nathalie shook her head again.

“ I know, sir, that you have a strong will, and that every one in this house obeys it, but I do not wish it to be exercised for me.”—He smiled and did not seem offended at the imputation of wilfulness,—far from it ; but he quietly assured her, that as soon as he could explain the matter to her, Madame Marceau would of her own accord offer to repair her injustice ; and he pledged his word to the young girl, not to insist on her remaining unless it happened exactly so. Still Nathalie did not seem convinced.

“ *Allons*,” he observed with a dissatisfied smile, “ I perceive Sainville is dull, and Paris irresistible.”

“ Indeed I do not care for Paris !” quickly replied Nathalie, pained at this reproach.

He looked incredulous.

“ Upon my word !” she said, with ingenuous earnestness.

“ What ! you do not care for a life of pleasure, of balls, dances, plays, and so forth ?” he inquired with his keen look.

“ Indeed, I do not. Besides, there is dancing here also.”

“ Then my child,” he remarked, in his usual tone, “ do not think of going with Madame de Mérис. She is gay, thoughtless ; unfit to protect any young girl.”

“Has she not daughters, sir?”

“Two, on whom nature has bestowed an excellent safeguard, and to whom fortune has moreover granted the protection of large dowries.”

“I can protect myself,” returned Nathalie with some pride.

“From wrong, I believe you; from annoyance, allow me to doubt it. Besides, for reasons not offensive to you, but useless to mention, I am convinced that Madame de Mérис, willing to oblige my sister as she is, would very soon regret having accepted you as the companion of her daughters.”

“And why so?” asked Nathalie, rather offended.

“Because,” he replied, with a smile, “they are very plain.”

“Ah!” she said, a little disconcerted.

“Well,” he resumed, “have I convinced you?”

“I have another objection.”

“Another!”

“Yes, sir, another. Why should I stay here, and by my presence, deprive Madame Marceau of her son’s society?”

“I might answer to this, that as you are innocent and as he is culpable, it is only just he should suffer; but you would raise some other objection. Suffice it then to mention, that my sister is ambitious for her son; that she is very glad of a pretence to keep him away at his studies; and that to prevent him from losing his time in the province, she intends spending

part of the winter in Paris. Have you any other objection?"

Nathalie looked at him very seriously.

"Sir," she said, "I will abide by your decision, for I have faith in your judgment and good feeling. But if you had a daughter, situated as I am, would you as her father—"

"Pray do not use that comparison," he interrupted, looking up and unable to repress a smile, "I am an old bachelor; the fatherly instinct is most imperfectly developed in me; I give you my word I have no idea how, as your father, I would, or ought to behave in such a matter."

"Well, then, if you had a sister," resumed Nathalie, slightly disconcerted.

"I have a sister," he replied, with some gloom.

"I beg your pardon, I understand," very hastily rejoined Nathalie, rising as she spoke.

"You impatient child, you do not understand at all," said he gently, compelling her to resume her seat; "you take fire on a word. Little credit as you give me for feeling, give me credit for common politeness. I disclaimed your comparison, because it rested on an impossible relationship. Have you then forgotten that I am your guardian, and that of your own accord you once called me your friend? Why did you not appeal to the friend and guardian?"

"And what would his answer have been?" asked Nathalie, looking up.

"Remain!"

“Then I will,” she exclaimed, yielding to an irresistible impulse, “for I believe, sir, that you are my friend; yes, my friend indeed!”

In a fit of southern fervour she took his hand and raised it so that it touched her lips, but she dropped it almost immediately, and rose from the seat pale and frightened at her own indiscretion. All that Mademoiselle Dantin had ever urged on feminine propriety rushed back to her mind to alarm her; as for any other feeling, save one of pure and grateful emotion, such as a very child might have felt, her conscience acquitted her of it, and though she was much mortified, she felt no shame.

Monsieur de Sainville had not moved, and as he sat in the shade she could not read the expression of his features. There was a brief and embarrassed pause.

“I see you wish to go in,” he quietly observed, rising, and taking her arm as he spoke.

Nathalie did not answer, but, looking around her, she perceived that the grounds were almost solitary, and felt somewhat surprised at not having noticed this before. They walked home in profound silence. In her first terror of being misconstrued, she longed to explain, but her pride revolted against it.

“No,” she thought, “if he has so little tact and delicacy as not to perceive that I was only foolish, let him think all he likes.”

They had entered the château, and stood in the lighted hall, as she came to this conclusion. She

could not resist the temptation of looking up into his face as they parted. He seemed so calm and friendly, that a weight was immediately removed from her mind. She felt that she had not been misunderstood ; that her fear was an act of injustice to herself ; above all, of injustice to him.

She went up to her room, and abstained from appearing at the late and large dinner which was to precede the lottery. She sat near her open window, thinking, when a gentle tap at her room door roused her from her abstraction. It was Aunt Radegonde come to fetch her. She began by dwelling pathetically on the shock Nathalie's projected departure had given her.

“ Oh ! Petite,” she concluded, with a sigh, “ how glad I am that Armand did interfere ! It is very selfish, of course, for me to wish you to remain here, and so Rosalie told me ; still I cannot help it. I cannot help being delighted at your staying, and am very grateful to Armand, who, for my sake, made it all right again. Well, are you coming ? the lottery has already begun.”

Nathalie pleaded a headache.

“ We shall keep out of the noise in the little back drawing-room ; the folding-doors have been taken down, and there is a handsome velvet drapery instead. Armand said it would be better for us to stay there, and that he would take care of my tickets for me. You must come. He is quite vexed because you

were not present at the dinner. He sent me up to fetch you, saying, he knew you would not mind a servant's message, but that you could not refuse me. He added that he, your guardian, summoned you to make your appearance below; and though I think myself it is rather ridiculous for him to persist in claiming you as his ward, still he has been so good to-day, that we must indulge him a little. Just take off that mantilla, if you like; your dress will do very well."

Nathalie at length yielded to her arguments, and accompanied her down stairs. Madame Marceau had invited about forty or fifty select guests to be present at the drawing of the lottery. They were chiefly persons whose political connexions and influence might be useful to her brother in the approaching elections. A few belonged to the provincial aristocracy; by far the greater number were of the wealthy *bourgeoisie*. After skilfully agitating amongst their inferior brethren in the afternoon's fête, she had reserved these for the evening's seductions. About twenty of the most influential had come to dinner. The saloon was brilliantly lit up, and as there were many well-dressed women, it looked gay and pretty; but Madame Marceau had done everything to avoid éclat; she wished this to appear what she repeatedly called it,—“a little domestic fête and familiar réunion.”

The lottery was already far advanced when the

two ladies entered. At one end of the drawing-room, stood a small table, with a silver urn, from which a young and pretty girl, the daughter of the Prefect, gravely drew forth, one after another, small scrolls of paper, rolled like ancient papyrus manuscripts; on each of these scrolls was inscribed the number of a ticket, to which capricious Fortune sometimes adjudged a prize, and oftener a blank. Another table, much larger, stood facing this; it was covered with the prizes, which the elder sister of the first young girl graciously distributed to the winners. Both tables were surrounded by animated groups, talking and laughing with French vivacity. Nathalie only caught a glimpse of this scene, through which the Canoness hurried her.

“It is much pleasanter here, is it not?” she observed, drawing aside the velvet drapery, which fell once more in dark and heavy folds behind them.

The little saloon had been tastily fitted up as a sort of cool retreat, which Madame Marceau had destined to her political *têtes-à-têtes*; little anticipating that it would be occupied by her aunt and Nathalie. It was redolent with the fragrance of exquisite flowers and shrubs; a solitary lamp, suspended from the ceiling, shed around a pale, trembling ray, which scarcely dispelled the mysterious twilight of the place. Madame Marceau and her friend sat on a low divan; Monsieur de Sainville stood near them. No one else was present. On

perceiving Nathalie, Madame Marceau called up her most gracious smile, rose, went up to her, and took her hand.

“*Chère Petite*,” she said, “you look pale. Are you tired? Do you know, I think you are too delicate a great deal for the excitement of pleasure?”

“If you had seen her dancing, you would not think so,” decisively interrupted Aunt Radegonde.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a significant look; but the Canoness neither took nor understood the hint.

“Indeed, aunt,” resumed the lady, “Mademoiselle Montolieu is more delicate than you think; and I begin to imagine that the country air is not only quite necessary to her, but that Paris——”

“I tell you she is not delicate at all,” again interrupted Aunt Radegonde, now speaking rather indignantly.

Madame Marceau saw her aunt would spoil all, if she continued to dwell on this theme; she therefore observed, in a wholly altered tone, and slightly drawing herself up to speak with suitable dignity:

“Mademoiselle Montolieu, we are friends; indeed, we have never ceased to be so. Yes,” she continued, lowering her voice, and speaking with affected discretion, but not so low as not to be heard from the divan, “I feel now that we are friends, beyond the power of misunderstanding. I am sorry not to have sought myself the clear explanation which my brother,

with his prompt judgment, perceived to be necessary. I need not tell you how I admire your resolve,—the result of a prudence and high principle almost above your years. Still less need I tell you how sincerely I hope our dull house may long be your home.”

She pressed her hand, beckoned to her friend, and left the place. Monsieur de Sainville waited until the velvet drapery had fallen upon them to approach Nathalie, and say, in a low tone :

“ Are you content ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I am.”

He left them.

Monsieur de Sainville had taken an early opportunity to inform his sister that Nathalie had pledged herself never to become the wife of Charles Marceau. More than this he had not said ; nor had she asked to know more. Satisfied with this assurance, and anxious to please her brother, with whom she felt she had already ventured farther than was either prudent or expedient, Madame Marceau had immediately exclaimed “ that she felt the greatest regard for Mademoiselle Montolieu, and would, in her dear Armand’s presence, ask her to stay.” To which her dear Armand, without thinking it necessary to inform her that she had unconsciously suggested the only condition on which Nathalie would now remain, had quietly replied :

“ Indeed, Rosalie, you will please me very much by doing so.”

“Please him! Why had he not said so at once? Was there anything she wished more than to please him? But he was so unkind; he would not let her know what pleased him! She guessed sometimes”—this was a hint for the elections—“and other times she failed; all because he was so reserved with his poor Rosalie.”

Before, however, making this concession, Madame Marceau had prudently dropped a few hints to her friend. She had feelingly deplored the hardships of certain positions, which, in violence to the heart’s better feelings, often compelled one to act with seeming unkindness. When a young man of fortune and family took a fancy to a pretty face, it was very difficult to guess that the individual thus distinguished had sufficient humility and principle not to be dazzled, and mistake what was only a passing caprice for a serious attachment; and hard to imagine that, on being properly appealed to, this individual could solemnly pledge herself never to enter into a secret or open engagement with the infatuated youth. Madame de Jussac, who heard her with a smile, assured her that she was not so much astonished; she had heard of such things, and found nothing incredible in the present case. But Madame Marceau, resolved she should be satisfied that it was really so, had taken care to make her assist at the explanation, which she had worded so that it might please both her brother and the mother of her in whom she still

hoped to see the future bride of Charles. For though Nathalie was to spend this winter in Sainville, Madame Marceau by no means contemplated her prolonged sojourn as either desirable or proper, and did not apprehend the want of a convenient pretence, whenever the time arrived, for her to go in earnest.

Aunt Radegonde did not look much pleased when her nephew left them to the seclusion of the little saloon. "He might have stayed; but, thank heaven, they could do without him,—and without any one else, too. This was a nice quiet place; yet, if Nathalie preferred the drawing-room, they would go in."

Nathalie assured her that she preferred this retired spot; they remained; few came to disturb their seclusion, or paid them more than passing visits. The Canoness drew the divan near the drapery, and slightly drawing this aside, fastened it so that, whilst remaining in its deep shadow, they could see and hear almost all that passed in the drawing-room. Nathalie looked and listened, but she could fix her attention on nothing. Whilst the childish voice of the young girl near the silver urn read scroll after scroll, and exclamations of affected triumph, and still more affected disappointment, greeted her announcements of gain or loss, her memory wandered back to the incidents of the afternoon. Now she saw herself lying under the beech-tree; then she heard once more the music of the dance, or suddenly found

herself sitting alone with Monsieur de Sainville, and hearing his melancholy voice say to her, “ Strange ! in those matters, I think nothing strange.” She looked for him amongst the guests ; he sat by Madame de Jussac ; not a word of their conversation reached her ear ; but though they smiled, she knew it was not friendly ; in vain the lady seemed to pour forth her softest blandishments ; something stern in his face, which Nathalie knew very well, remained still to show that he disowned her power. From them, Nathalie’s glance wandered to other groups ; but her head throbbed and burned ; the glaring light annoyed her ; she soon drew back into the shade, and heard, without heeding, the remarks of Aunt Radegonde, blending with the hum of the many conversations in the drawing-room. About an hour had thus elapsed, when the Canoness exclaimed :

“ The lottery is over, and here is Armand coming, with our prizes.”

The divan was immediately restored to its former place, as Monsieur de Sainville entered, followed by a servant, carrying a small tray, on which appeared the prizes, by no means numerous. The servant placed the tray on a small table near the divan, and retired.

“ Aunt,” said Monsieur de Sainville, opening his pocket-book, “ I took charge of your fifteen tickets—I also attended to my own—forty in all. Less prudent than you, I allowed myself to be victimized to the extent of twenty-five tickets, at the price of two

francs each. Well, aunt, my deliberate conclusion is, that of all the cheating transactions I ever witnessed, and I have seen a good many, a charitable lottery is the most barefaced."

"What! Armand; was there not fair play?"

"No. I acquit the individuals, but I accuse the system; it is founded, from beginning to end, on victimizing, which falls chiefly on my unfortunate sex. Ladies get up these things, and seduce their male friends into the purchase of tickets, for which they work prizes, which being all essentially feminine articles, are useless when won, and therefore return to them as presents; we pay and do the real charity—always deluded into the belief that we shall get our money's worth—they obtain all the praise."

"Armand," impatiently said his aunt, "do tell us what we have got? The first five tickets are for Petite."

"The first five tickets were blanks."

"Poor child!" observed the Canoness, turning towards Nathalie; "you shall share my better fortune."

"The next ten tickets obtained one prize."

"One! only one! and what was it?"

"A cigar-case. Here it is."

"A cigar-case!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde; "and what am I to do with a cigar-case?"

"Anything you like, aunt, provided you do not offer it to me."

“ Well, Armand, what did your twenty-five tickets get?”

“ Three prizes, essentially feminine, of course, and one of them my own gift to the lottery. Here is a purse, aunt, which may not be of much use to you, but which you will value for the sake of the maker.”

He dropped Nathalie’s ridiculed purse in his aunt’s lap, as he spoke.

“ Have you got nothing for Petite, Armand?”

“ Yes; this pair of Chinese slippers; I can warrant them genuine, for I brought them from Canton myself.”

Nathalie thanked him, and looked delighted.

“ What a pity they are so small,” said the Canoness, taking up one of the slippers.

“ They are not too small,” promptly observed her nephew.

“ Indeed they are, Armand.”

“ I assure you, aunt, they are not.”

“ How can you tell?”

“ I know they are not too small.”

“ I never saw any one so dogmatic,” impatiently said the Canoness; “ but I am determined you shall not always have your way.”

Before Nathalie could guess what she was going to do, or oppose, she put the slipper on the young girl’s foot; she remained mute—it fitted.

“ Well, aunt?” said Monsieur de Sainville, with a smile.

“ Well—what about it?” sharply asked his aunt ; “ Petite does not want your ugly Chinese things : take them back.”

She pushed the remaining slipper over to him ; but Nathalie quickly snatched it back, on perceiving Monsieur de Sainville extending his hand to take it, and deliberately put it on : then looked at her feet with all the admiration of a child for its new toy.

“ Take them off, Petite,” said the Canoness : “ ugly things, with their turned-up toes !”

Nathalie laughed, said they were original, and that she would wear them. The remonstrances of the Canoness induced her to take them off, but she persisted in keeping them. Aunt Radegonde, who was either domineered over, or domineering, looked peevish, until she remembered they had not yet seen the remaining prize. He produced it, a plain brown silk purse, which he intended keeping, because it was strong and safe. The Canoness looked triumphant : it was she who had begun that purse, and Petite who had finished it, “ so that Monsieur Armand, after all his ridiculing, was glad to have something of their manufacture.” Monsieur Armand indulged his aunt in her triumph, and sat down by her side. She reminded him once that he ought to appear in the drawing-room ; but he quietly replied, “ I am not host to-day—I am guest ; I shall stay here : I prefer it.”

He remained, and entered into a conversation with his aunt ; but Nathalie, though usually attentive to

his discourse, could not keep her mind fixed upon it now. The fatigue of the day weighed her down, and the vague sounds from the next room lulled her to sleep. At first she resisted; then, spite of all her efforts, her head became more and more heavy: the little saloon, with its flowery recesses, and pale lamp, seemed to float in a mist before her eyes; at length her lids closed, and she slept. Once she was half-awakened by the voice of Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly saying:

“Poor little thing! she has fallen asleep.”

“Shall I awaken her, and take her to her room, Armand?” asked the voice of his aunt.

“Why so? she looks very comfortable thus.”

“Then help me to put this cushion under her head.”

Nathalie felt her head gently raised for a moment; the next it had sunk into the soft pillow placed beneath it, and she was once more in a deep slumber. She had slept thus for some time, when she suddenly awoke with the vague, undefined consciousness, that something—she knew not what—had happened. She looked up with a start; the sounds from the drawing-room had ceased: all in the little saloon was silent. The lamp still burned with its clear pale ray; the velvet drapery was slightly drawn aside, and in the opening stood the calm and handsome Madame de Jussac, looking like a vision, in her white silk dress. Nathalie eyed her with surprise; for the lady’s lan-

guid face now wore a peculiar smile, half of irony, half of triumph. The young girl looked around her ; the Canoness was peacefully nodding by her side. Where was Monsieur de Sainville ? She turned slightly, and beheld him standing within a few paces of the divan. His face looked more dark and morose than she had seen it for many a day ; it was at him Madame de Jussac looked ; he returned her glance with evident *hauteur*.

“ Have they been quarrelling ? ” thought Nathalie.

“ What a charming place to meditate in , ” said the lady ; “ I do not wonder that a philosopher, a grave, reflective man, like you, should find it delightful.”

“ I suspect there has been more sleep here than meditation , ” said Madame Marceau, whose dark and smiling face now appeared over the shoulder of her friend.

“ *I* did not sleep , ” said the Canoness, wakening up. Madame de Jussac smiled.

“ Neither did your nephew , ” she said ; “ I found him engaged in a deep fit of musing.”

“ Politics ! ” observed Madame Marceau, coming in and looking very graciously at her brother ; for the influential individuals whom she had that evening sounded, had entered into her views even more readily than she could in her warmest anticipations have hoped.

Nathalie perceiving that the guests were gone, rose

and entered the front drawing-room ; it was empty. Some of the lights were out ; most had burned low ; the floor was covered with fragments of the little scrolls ; a few withered bouquets lay about ; the whole room wore that disordered aspect so admirably conveyed in Hogarth's celebrated picture. Nathalie looked around her, and thought that those late pleasures had something dreary and hollow in all their gay brilliancy. Without seeking to listen, she overheard the close of a conversation between Madame Marceau and her brother in the little saloon.

“ I cannot understand,” he said in a dry, sharp voice, “ how so absurd a rumour was propagated. No less than five persons mentioned it to me this evening as a current report. I, a candidate at the approaching elections ! I, trying to become deputy : the mere idea is ridiculous.”

“ Monsieur de Sainville is above politics ! ” said the soft ironical voice of Madame de Jussac.

“ Armand,” asked his sister, in a low but distinct tone, “ do you mean to say, that if a candidacieship is offered to you, you will decline it ? ”

“ I mean to say, that I shall decline it.”

Nathalie heard Madame Marceau rise abruptly, and leave the little saloon with a quick hurried step. She approached the table near which the young girl stood ; took up a volume of engravings, turned over the pages with a trembling hand, then closed the book and pushed it away with angry haste. Nathalie

looked at her with evident but unobserved wonder: there was no mistaking the meaning of the bent brow, flashing eyes and compressed lips; resentment, the deeper for its suppression, was in every haughty and quivering lineament. For a few minutes she stood there struggling against passion; at length her features became somewhat more composed; a chair was by her; she sat down with moody and abstracted glance. At the very moment when her schemes seemed near their fulfilment, her brother—their supposed instrument—stepped in and blasted them with a few haughty words. Twice in one evening had her haughty will to vail before his; the first disappointment had seemed light until this second deeper one gave it new bitterness. She felt baffled, irritated, and aggrieved; for years she had looked up to Monsieur de Sainville as the hope of her fallen fortunes; but now, she bitterly asked herself if, after being the good, he could not become the evil genius of her destiny.

She made an effort to smooth her brow, and look cheerful as Madame de Jussac drew near. The legitimist lady had never been in the secret of her political plans, and she flattered herself with the belief, that they were too deeply laid to be divined by her; to her great relief it was not her whom the lady addressed, but Nathalie.

“Mademoiselle Montolieu,” said she, in her soft caressing voice, “I have been persuading our good

Canoness to come home with me to-morrow: of course you will accompany her?"

Nathalie was somewhat taken by surprise, but she quietly assented. Madame Marceau looked up with slight astonishment, soon succeeded by indifference. Her aunt and Nathalie might go where they liked: other thoughts occupied her.

"Come, Petite," said the Canoness, leaving the little saloon in her turn, "what are you doing here? Look, it is near one. Well, what do you want in there?" she added, as she saw Nathalie push the drapery aside; "the slippers! Why you do not want to wear them at night; ugly things!"

Without heeding her the young girl re-entered the little saloon. Monsieur de Sainville sat alone on the divan more morose than ever. He looked up and his look was not gracious.

"Have you forgotten anything?" he asked, in a brief tone.

"The slippers, sir," she replied with a glance of surprise.

He had never addressed her thus before.

"Here they are." He handed them to her quickly, as if her presence importuned him.

Nathalie took them silently, but when she reached the drapery she suddenly came back. She remembered Madame de Jussac's invitation, and thought he might be offended about that.

“Sir,” said she simply, “have I done anything wrong?”

He looked at her with evident surprise. She stood before him with serious, yet child-like grace, and he could not help thinking, that none save a child would have asked such a question.

“You have done nothing wrong,” he replied, in his usual tone; “but it is late, my aunt is waiting for you: good night.”

CHAPTER V.

AT an early hour on the following morning Madame de Jussac left, accompanied by the Canoness and her young companion. Her château was a few leagues away ; Nathalie had often heard it mentioned as one of the most elegant and luxurious abodes in the province. She expected to be pleased, and was only disappointed ; it was essentially a modern abode, and wealth could not replace the antique charm of Sainville.

The same disappointment awaited her in the pleasures which the château afforded ; they were varied and frequent, but to Nathalie they seemed cold and monotonous. Thanks to the evident partiality of Madame de Jussac for her, she could not complain of neglect ; indeed, she received great and very flattering attention ; but she received it with indifference, for during the whole week that the visit lasted, she was

a prey to *ennui*. “If this is good society,” thought she, “I have enough of it.” She found some pleasure, however, in walking in the garden. There was a high terrace, with marble vases filled with flowers, that reminded her of Sainville, and from which the old château was visible in the fine weather. She came there early in the morning, before the Canoness was up, and was generally joined by Madame de Jussac.

“You are looking for Sainville,” said the lady to her, one morning, when she found her standing by the stone balustrade, with her look fastened on the horizon; “you cannot see it yet, the mist is too great; you seem to like Sainville.”

“I like it very much.”

“Yes, it is a pleasant place.”

She took the young girl’s arm; they walked up and down the lonely terrace; the lady spoke of Sainville and its inhabitants; Nathalie listened. The name of Charles Marceau happened to be mentioned, and Nathalie, with a heedlessness which she immediately repented, allowed Madame de Jussac to perceive that the intended marriage between the young man and her daughter was known to her. Madame de Jussac looked amused.

“So, my dear child,” she said, smiling, “you really have believed that a daughter of mine would one day be Madame Charles Marceau.”

Nathalie looked disconcerted, Madame de Jussac

kindly assured her she was not in the least offended, though the idea had certainly amused her. She then proceeded to an analysis of her friend's son, from which it appeared that Charles was ignorant and presumptuous, without either the name or position which could induce even the most kindly disposed to overlook those disadvantages.

“ Is he not to take the name of De Sainville, and is he not his uncle's heir ? ” asked Nathalie.

Madame de Jussac gave her a penetrating glance, and asked her, with a smile, if she believed this. Nathalie quietly assured her that she did ; upon which Madame de Jussac composedly replied that she did not think so. She spoke like one who knew more than she said.

“ The only real claim of Monsieur Charles Marceau on attention,” she resumed, after a pause, “ is that he chances to be the nephew of a gentleman who might, if he wished, be the first man of this district, and indeed of the province ; but who, spite of the haughty inaction to which he condemns himself, is, nevertheless, a very remarkable man.”

Nathalie heard her with surprise, but she was destined to be more astonished still. Madame de Jussac, with a freedom from pique and resentment which charmed her listener, proceeded to draw a highly-coloured and somewhat flattering portrait of her late host. He was not only the soul of generosity and honour,—not only a man of powerful and

varied intellect,—but he was naturally of a most amiable and winning disposition. Nathalie could not help demurring; she thought him cold and severe.

“ My dear child,” softly said the lady, “ you would not think so if you had seen what I have seen; namely, Monsieur de Sainville in love.”

Nathalie looked as if she longed to question; but there was no need; Madame de Jussac was willing to speak.

“ It was indeed some years ago; but I assure you that he was then what he is now; the difference, if there was any, was slight. I have some experience; I have seen many men in love, but he is the only one who, to my seeming, could love deeply, passionately even, without looking foolish or ridiculous; and if you could only guess how rare, how very rare, that is !”

She said more, but her language was less clear than she who listened desired; indeed, she soon completely changed the subject, and from Monsieur de Sainville passed to Monsieur de Sainville’s political opinions. She deplored that a man of his birth and talent declined devoting himself to the cause of legitimacy, and as Nathalie did not seem much impressed with this reasoning, she entered into a long and detailed explanation of the legitimist doctrines, which lasted an hour and a half. Every morning a similar conversation recurred between them, with this difference, that the name of Charles Marceau was no

more mentioned, and that the political lectures of Madame de Jussac became more and more eloquent. Nathalie did not for one moment imagine that her conversion to legitimacy was the lady's object, and though expressions, which she did not then notice, but which she afterwards remembered, led her to think so at a later period, her present impression was, that her hostess had taken a fancy to her, and mentioned politics because politics were uppermost in her mind.

The day for their return came at length, and there was something in Nathalie's face as they neared Sainville, which struck even the Canoness. The young girl was always looking out of the carriage-window, admiring everything which they passed, and praising all she saw with so much warmth and animation, that Aunt Radegonde observed with much finesse,—

“ Ah! Petite, you want me to think you are delighted to go home; you want me to think that you prefer our dull place to that gay château de Jussac.”

“ Indeed I do,” very decisively replied Nathalie. But Aunt Radegonde's penetration was not to be thus deceived, and she saw, she said, through her young friend's kind-hearted ruse. It was evening when they reached the château; Madame Marceau was unwell in her room.

“ Then we shall spend the evening together in my boudoir,” said the Canoness with a little selfish joy; “ will you wait for me there, Petite, whilst I go up to

Rosalie's room? If Armand should come, tell him he is not to go without seeing me; keep him in conversation."

Nathalie went up to the boudoir. She found everything familiar and cheerful looking, and felt glad to be come back; it seemed as if she had been, not a few days, but a whole month away. The door opened; she started, but it was only Amanda, who came in for some trifling purpose, and seemed delighted to see mademoiselle once more. Nathalie heard her abstractedly, and felt relieved when she left. About ten minutes elapsed, the door opened again; this time Nathalie did not look up from her work.

"How industrious you are already," said the voice of Aunt Radegonde.

Nathalie looked up slowly; the Canoness was alone. She had found her niece very unwell; nothing serious, of course, still it was very provoking, for it would delay her intended journey to Paris for a month or six weeks; such was the doctor's decision. Then followed a long dissertation on illnesses in general, and on two or three very remarkable illnesses with which the Canoness had been afflicted, and during which she had been attended by Doctor Montolieu. Nathalie heard her with such evident abstraction, that Aunt Radegonde ended by noticing it.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with you to-night," she said, a little pettishly; "you start and jump in a very peculiar way. Are you nervous? I

hope not, for when Rosalie is gone we shall have a lonely life of it; and if every sound fidgets you so, what will you do in the long winter evenings, without even Armand to come in and talk for an hour?"

Nathalie looked up.

"Will Monsieur de Sainville accompany Madame Marceau?" she asked.

"Accompany her, Petite! Why did I not tell you? How forgetful you are; I am sure I told you."

"You told me nothing," said Nathalie, laying down her work.

"What! I did not say Armand was gone?"

"Gone! No, Marraine, you did not."

"Well, he is gone, Petite; gone for the winter; gone to Spain, I believe. I dare say he will come back next spring, or next summer at the latest. Indeed, if you can only get over your nervousness, we shall have a very quiet and comfortable winter."

Nathalie looked thoughtful, and worked on in silence.

The winter set in early. It was, as the Canoness had predicted, extremely quiet. Madame Marceau brooded over her disappointments in her own room, whence she seldom emerged. At length she took her departure for Paris, where the elegant Amanda accompanied her. The Canoness and the young girl remained alone in the château, with the servants; and never did solitude weigh so heavily on Nathalie.

Amongst the "wrongs of women," few are really

more heavy and insupportable than the forced inactivity to which they are condemned in all the life, fire, and energy of youth. That thirst for pleasure, for which they are so much reproved, is only the thirst for excitement and action. They are social prisoners, and, like the enchanted princesses of fairy tales, they look down from the high and inaccessible tower of their solitude on the life and action ever going on beneath them, but in which they must never hope to join. Some, timid and shrinking, love their sheltering captivity; by far the greater number hate it in their hearts, yet, obedient to necessity, grow either apathetic or resigned: a few, more daring, or rendered reckless, break through their bonds, and throw themselves into the social strife; but for one who wins the shore, how many perish miserably!

Ennui, in all its dreariness, now fell on Nathalie. She regretted the school of Mademoiselle Dantin. There she had to struggle and act;—she lived. But here, it seemed as if the shadow of more than monastic stillness had suddenly fallen upon her existence. No visitors came to the château, in the absence of its master. Once, Madame de Jussac called; she looked slightly disconcerted on hearing that Monsieur de Sainville was gone. Nathalie longed for an invitation similar to that which she had formerly so little valued; but Madame de Jussac left without opening her lips on that subject, and, indeed, without uttering

more than a few smooth phrases. She returned no more.

In the long winter evenings, when Aunt Radegonde slept, or indulged in monotonous speech, Nathalie thought of Monsieur de Sainville, and followed him in his southern wanderings with something like envy. Why was he free as air, whilst she was condemned to waste her youth, and perhaps all her existence, in this forced repose? The only thing that did her good was to take long solitary walks in the garden and grounds. She came in cold and fatigued, but at least relieved for awhile of the superfluous energy which oppressed her, and made stillness of mind and body a sort of inexpressible torment. Three months thus passed away.

Madame Marceau had been gone a few weeks, when, on a bleak afternoon, Nathalie went out for her daily walk, in spite of all the remonstrances of the Canoness. She remained out about two hours, and re-entered the house as evening set in. She proceeded, as usual, to the *boudoir* of Aunt Radegonde. The lamp was unlit; but the wood fire burned with a soft and subdued glow. The young girl liked this quiet time; for then the Canoness slept, and allowed Nathalie to wander away in her inner world of thought. She now softly closed the door, came in on tip-toe, went up to the window, allowed the curtains to fall in heavy folds, which excluded the glimmering twilight, listened for awhile

at the back of Aunt Radegonde's arm-chair, and, concluding from the stillness there that its tenant slept, quietly glided around it to her place,—a low seat, on the other side of the fire; then, leaning her forehead on her hand, she looked at the burning embers, and fell into a deep fit of musing. She thought of sunny Spain,—of barren plains, wild valleys, and old Moorish cities, where all night long were heard the sounds of dance and serenade.

“Have you got a head-ache?” asked a well-known voice.

She did not start, look up, or turn round; she remained in the same attitude, as if arrested thus by the power of enchantment.

“I am sure you are not well, Petite,” continued the voice, now sounding like that of Aunt Radegonde.

“And I am sure, that though you change your voice, and call me Petite, you are not Marraine!” cried Nathalie, eagerly bending forward; but the arm-chair stood in the shade, and she could not see. “No matter,” she impatiently added, “I know very well who you are. There! I see you now!” she triumphantly exclaimed, as a flickering light arose, and displayed the smiling face of Monsieur de Sainville, who now occupied his aunt's arm-chair, facing Nathalie. The flame also lit up her features; she looked more than glad; she seemed delighted. He amused himself for a few moments in watching her changing face, as changing as the wavering light

which fell on it now. “So you are really come back!” she said, rubbing her little hands with evident glee, and not seeming in the least to think it necessary to hide the pleasure she felt at Monsieur de Sainville’s return.

“Yes, I am really come back,” he replied; and he did not look displeased at the evident gratification his return afforded to the young girl. It was, to say the truth, something new in his experience, to see a face brightening through his unexpected presence.

Nathalie shook her head, laughed a gay short laugh, rose abruptly, walked up and down the room, came back to her seat, and, allowing herself to fall down upon it with negligent grace, said gaily:

“I am so glad!”

“Glad of what?” he asked, as if willing to indulge himself for once in the pleasure of this *naïve* flattery.

“Glad that you are come back, sir.”

“Indeed! why so, my child?” he slowly asked.

“Because I am half dead with *ennui*!”

“Candid confession!” he exclaimed, looking, and feeling, perhaps, a little piqued.

“Indeed, sir, it is candid. If *ennui* could kill, I should be quite dead.”

“And how do you know I shall dissipate yours?”

“Oh! *Mon Dieu!*” cried Nathalie, looking much dismayed, “you are going away again?”

“No, not this winter, at least.”

She looked much relieved.

“So you suffered from *ennui*?” he said.

She shook her head, and gave a rueful sigh. He smiled, and said, “Poor child!” but his smile was not very compassionate, as he asked her “what sort of an *ennui* it was?”

“A desperate *ennui*, sir; something quite overpowering that took hold of me in the morning, and did not leave me at night.”

“You found the château dull, I suppose?”

“I found it empty, sir.”

“Do you know,” he resumed, after a brief pause, “that you must have good nerves? You did not seem a bit frightened—scarcely startled, on finding me here so unexpectedly.”

“Because I knew your voice at the very first word you uttered; besides, it did not seem so strange that you should be there. I was thinking of you, of you and Spain. Oh, sir, do tell me something about it. Is it a fine country? Do you like the Spanish women? Are they so very pretty? Did you see them dance?”

“I came back through your Arles,” he replied, without answering her rapid questioning.

“Arles! you came through Arles! Oh, *mon Dieu!*”

There was emotion in her voice. Without seeming to heed it, he rang for the light.

“ And how did Arles look ?” asked Nathalie, when the servant was gone.

“ I could see no change.”

But Nathalie was not content. She questioned him minutely ; he answered patiently, and gave her every detail she desired, yet each reply made her look more thoughtful and more sad. When she had no more to ask, and he no more to say, she gave a deep sigh, and remained silent. Monsieur de Sainville now stood near the table, unfastening a little osier basket which he had brought with him.

“ Mademoiselle Nathalie,” said he, turning towards her, “ do come and look at something I have brought from my travels.”

She rose, and approached, without seeming much interested. He asked her to guess the contents of the basket. She looked at it ; turned round it, came back to her place, shook her head, and said she did not know. He smiled, and bade her raise the lid. She promptly obeyed, for her curiosity was somewhat roused ; to her surprise, she saw nothing but green moss.

“ Look beneath,” said he.

She raised the moss, and beneath it, enshrined in another bed of moss which they perfumed, she perceived a bouquet of such flowers as the late season afforded. She looked up rather disappointed.

“ They are for you,” he quietly observed.

“ For me, sir !” she exclaimed, with a quick searching look.

“ Yes ; have you no idea where they come from ?”

“ They come from Arles,” she replied, in a low tone.

She raised the bunch of flowers from their mossy bed, softly and silently, without one of the exclamations of pleasure Monsieur de Sainville had expected ; looked at them for a few moments, and they seemed as fresh as if newly gathered by the hand which held them : then bent over them, silently still.

“ Well !” he at length observed, “ do they look genuine ?”

She slowly raised her head, and looked up into his face, as he stood by her side ; her face was covered with tears.

“ Oh, sir,” she said, “ how shall I thank you ?”

He smiled, a little sadly, at her emotion ; he loved Sainville : but the fountain from which flew such tears had long run dry for him.

“ If you only knew where I had procured these flowers,” he observed, after a pause.

“ What ! are they not from Arles ?”

“ Yes ; but from what garden of Arles ?”

Her colour came and went ; she gave him a troubled look full of inquiry, but his face remained impenetrable. At length she faltered out that “ she could not tell—she did not know.”

“ Well, it was only in the garden of a little house that stands apart somewhere in the suburbs. There is an old stone bench just by the porch ; and in the garden behind the house is a little fountain, with laurels around it.”

“ My aunt’s house! — our house! — the house where I was born !” cried Nathalie. “ *Oh, mon Dieu !* ”

She seemed unable to say more.

“ Oh, sir !” she at length added, “ what have I done that you should be so very kind to me ?”

She raised the flowers to her lips, and held out her hand to him ; he took it and seemed to enjoy her pleasure. But when this emotion had subsided she questioned him eagerly. By what chance had he discovered that house ;—for it was by chance, of course ? She remembered mentioning it to him once, still she did not suppose he had taken the trouble to find it out, for it was not easy to find ! She seemed so confident that it was all the result of chance that he looked slightly disconcerted, and allowed her to remain in that belief,—which did not seem, however, to lessen her gratitude in the least. Indeed, she was renewing her thanks with southern vivacity and fervour, when the door opened and Aunt Radegonde entered. Nathalie eagerly ran up to her, and told her the story of the bouquet. “ How kind it was of Monsieur de Sainville to bring those flowers to her, and what an extraordinary chance had made

him enter the very house where she and her aunt lived at Arles." The Canoness heard Nathalie without uttering a word, and gave her nephew an astonished look, which he did not seem to heed.

"Yes," she said abstractedly; "it is very peculiar, as you say, Petite."

She sat down in her arm-chair and looked musingly at the fire, whilst Nathalie left the room to put her flowers in water. Monsieur de Sainville, with his usual restlessness, was walking up and down the narrow *boudoir*.

"Aunt," said he, suddenly stopping short before her, "you said Mademoiselle Montolieu was quite well; -- I find her much thinner, poor little thing!"

"And if she is thin, what about it?" rather shortly asked his aunt.

"It is a great deal to me as her guardian."

The Canoness looked greatly provoked, but the entrance of Nathalie checked her reply. During her temporary absence, the Canoness had been engaged in giving orders for all the rooms devoted to her nephew's use to be aired, heated, and prepared, and especially for the dinner to be hurried as much as possible. Nathalie now brought the tidings that it was nearly ready.

"Why should we not dine up here? I like your boudoir, aunt," said Monsieur de Sainville.

“Oh! how delightful it would be, Marraine,” cried Nathalie.

The Canoness smiled at the idea of having a favour to grant. She pretended to hesitate a good deal and raise numerous objections, but she at length consented with much graciousness. The *boudoir* was far too small; and yet it was a pleasant meal; and when it was over, they had a very pleasant evening sitting all three around the fire. The ladies questioned Monsieur de Sainville on his travels, but he seemed to have been very little interested by what he saw, and consequently had not much to say on that score.

“Then why did you go, Armand?” asked his aunt.

“For the pleasure of coming back again, aunt; by far the most real pleasure of travelling.”

Monsieur de Sainville retired early. His aunt followed him out of the room with an important air, and looked very important when she returned, in the course of a quarter of an hour.

“Petite,” she gravely said; “do put by your work, I want to speak to you. Petite,” she resumed, as Nathalie complied with evident surprise; “reserve is a virtue highly necessary to women, and chiefly to women like us, in the unmarried state. Now, when I came in here this evening I found you standing there, with flowers in one hand, the other hand, my child, was in that of Armand. Mind,

I do not say it was wrong, but it was not quite reserved."

Nathalie coloured deeply, and did not reply at once.

"Marraine," she said at length, "it was an irresistible impulse, foolish perhaps, but certainly innocent. Monsieur de Sainville has been so kind to me, that I sometimes feel as if I were his child and he my father."

"I never knew anything so absurd!" impatiently exclaimed the Canoness; "I perceive I must open your eyes as I have been opening his. He calls you 'his ward,' or 'a child,' or even 'poor little thing.' You speak of him as of an old man. Now, my dear, if both you and he labour under this great mistake, I, a woman of penetration, do not, and I feel it my duty to enlighten you; I assure you, therefore, that Armand could by no means be your father; just as I have been assuring him that you are neither a child nor a little girl."

"Oh, Marraine!" cried Nathalie, "how could you speak to him about anything of the kind?" She looked irritated and ashamed.

"Mademoiselle Petite," dryly said the Canoness, "allow me to say, that I am not only a woman of penetration, but also a woman of discretion and reserve. Do you imagine I said anything improper to my nephew? Do you imagine I alluded to the fact which I mentioned to you? No, indeed; but in an

adroit and delicate manner I introduced your name, and hinted that though you were so childish, you were not a child, but a young and very pretty girl. He took the hint, and said quite seriously, ‘ I know it, Aunt.’ ”

A rosy blush suffused the features of Nathalie ; she looked much discomposed, whilst the Canoness continued in her usual tone :

“ You see, you might have relied on my discretion, Petite. Indeed you need not have been so offended at what I said. In my time, my dear,” she added, glancing at her soft white hands, “ a lady’s hand was a rare and precious thing to touch ; and the lover admitted to kiss the tips of his lady’s fingers was often overpowered by his feelings,—the favour was so great. I know that in modern times relaxations have been introduced, but *I* cannot approve the principle.”

Nathalie looked up, her face was flushed, and when she spoke, she spoke quickly and with eager warmth.

“ Marraine,” she said, “ I know not if you have done right or wrong in speaking thus ; but this I know, that—come what may—I thank you.”

She rose, kissed her, and was gone.

“ Docile little creature,” thought the Canoness, delighted at the result of her interference ; “ how she will learn in time to understand the beauties of female celibacy.”

Nathalie was then in her room. She had paused in the act of undressing before her mirror, and now looked with smiling eyes and parted lips at the charming image its depths revealed. Oh ! wise Aunt Radegonde !

CHAPTER VI.

WINTER was over; but the spring was cool, and a bright wood fire burned on the drawing-room hearth. Though it was evening, the lamp was still unlit, the firelight almost supplied its place; its cheerful and vivid glow extended to the furthest extremity of the room, giving warmth to the old pictures on the wall, and light to the gleaming mirrors. The windows with curtains drawn back alone looked dark, yet, beyond them shone a few pale stars in the depths of the gloomy sky, against which, more gloomy still, waved the dark trees of the avenue.

On one side of the fire-place, but with her back turned to it, sat Nathalie on her low chair. One hand supported her cheek, the other rested on a book which lay open on her lap. She was slightly bent forward in the attitude of reading, and the light which fell on the open page, also lit up her clear and well-defined

profile. Monsieur de Sainville, similarly engaged, sat on the other side of the fire-place, but he faced the fire ; the flickering light fell in full upon him ; and whereas it gave a richer warmth and deeper colouring to the young girl's countenance, it only seemed to render his grave features more cold and colourless. They appeared to be alone, and neither spoke. Tired, perhaps, of the position he was compelled to assume in order to receive the light of the fire on the page he read, Monsieur de Sainville at length closed the volume and reclined back in his seat.

“ Do you wish for the lamp, sir ? ” asked Nathalie, in a low tone, and without looking up from her book ; “ shall I ring for it ? ”

“ Thank you,” he replied, speaking low like her ; “ it would only cause my sister to awaken ; she likes this evening sleep.”

Was Nathalie mistaken, or was there indeed something in the speaker's tone that justified the quick look she raised towards him ? but his features no longer received the light from the fire, and she could not trace their meaning ; hers assumed a surprised and puzzled expression as she glanced from Monsieur de Sainville to a sofa behind him. On this sofa his sister lay reclining in the more shadowy part of the room ; the sound of her breathing, quick and oppressed like that of a person in sleep, was heard at a regular interval. Nathalie listened to it for awhile, then rose, stepped softly across the room, and placed a screen

between Madame Marceau and the fire. As she was turning away from the couch she met Monsieur de Sainville's inquiring look.

"I was afraid the light might awaken her," she simply said, and resumed her seat.

He gave her a fixed and penetrating look, then once more took up his book and previous position.

Ever since her return from Paris, that is to say, for two months, Madame Marceau had been seriously ill; but this she pertinaciously refused to acknowledge. In spite of remonstrance and entreaties, she declared that she only laboured under slight indisposition; though she was compelled to keep reclining on the sofa all day long, nothing could induce her to retire to her own room; she persisted in remaining in the saloon, in order to see every one who might chance to call. Visits had never been numerous at the château of Sainville, they became less frequent every day; Madame de Jussac seldom came; yet, Madame Marceau, attired with her usual elegance, still remained in the drawing-room, ready to pay the honours of that house, of which she considered herself almost the mistress. The doctor warned, her brother remonstrated, both in vain: the sick lady shrank from taking to her bed, with a feeling that resembled horror; she seemed to entertain an instinctive and unconquerable dread of acknowledging, even thus indirectly, the fatal progress disease had made.

The Canoness acted in a wholly different spirit.

No sooner did the first severe cold give her a touch of rheumatism, than she clothed herself in flannel from head to foot, discovered that the drawing-room was full of draughts, retired to her little *boudoir*, and, having caused every cranny to be stopped up, and a huge fire to burn night and day in the chimney, was in a fair way of being suffocated, when both the doctor and Monsieur de Sainville fortunately interfered. But though she submitted very reluctantly to their advice, they wholly failed in persuading her that it would be possible for her to leave the *boudoir*, and not perish of cold. Nathalie's coaxing entreaties did, indeed, once succeed in bringing her down to the drawing-room, but after an hour's stay she went up in a shivering fit, declaring with some asperity, that unless there were a conspiracy against her life, no one would after this trial, think of asking her to come down again; which of course no one did. When she first determined on remaining in her *boudoir*, Aunt Radegonde imagined that Nathalie would be with her constantly; but Madame Marceau had since her return conceived so great an affection for the young girl, that she could not bear to have her out of her sight; she now called her "Petite," like her aunt; treated her with a kind familiarity, wholly free from patronage; and insisted on the exclusive possession of her society, to the great chagrin of Aunt Radegonde, who was thus obliged to be satisfied with the companionship of Amanda.

The elegant *femme-de-chambre*, whose life had been spent with *la fleur des pois* of the French *noblesse*, felt wounded in her artistic pride. Was it because she condescended to receive a salary, that her talents were to remain idle? Why she was losing her lightness and delicacy of touch with every day's inaction! This indirect appeal to Madame Marceau's sense of justice produced an increase in the yearly sum which Mademoiselle Amanda was in the habit of receiving; and which increase was considered by this experienced *coiffeuse* as a very slight compensation for the inexpressible damage she sustained in thus doing nothing. To say the truth, she was not quite so inactive as she chose to appear, since she had succeeded in persuading Nathalie to accept of her daily services; by which means she had not only kept her hand in, but also relieved herself of a great superfluity of speech; lamenting her fate to the young girl, and appealing to "mademoiselle, to know whether the château had not become insufferably dull?"

The château was, indeed, anything but a gay sojourn; but though she was thus secluded from every society, save that of its owners, Nathalie did not find this monotony wearisome. A time had been when she would have shrunk with terror and *ennui* from so monastic an existence; but now she found a soothing charm in its very regularity and tranquil tenor. She liked, since Madame Marceau had become kind, without condescension, to sit with her, read

and play to her, to secretly perform for her those little offices which the sick lady would not, in her pride, acknowledge that she needed, but with which she could not, dispense; she liked even those dull and silent evenings by the fireside, whilst Madame Marceau slept,—evenings, which, though so quiet, had yet a dreamy charm of their own.

The room was again silent; the fire was burning low; Monsieur de Sainville stooped to arrange it; a broad jet of flame arose, and shed its light on Nathalie and her book; but, as if this light annoyed him, he drew back into the shade.

“Mademoiselle Nathalie,” said he, in a low tone, “do you ever go to the garden now?”

Nathalie started slightly; but, without looking up from her book, she replied, in the same key:

“Not often, sir.”

“I thought so. In the first place, I never see you there; in the second, you have looked pale of late. Pray take a little exercise; and pray,” he added, after a pause, “do not read thus by fire-light; it is bad for the sight.”

Nathalie neither answered nor looked up; but a furtive smile trembled on her lips.

“I know what you mean,” he continued; “but you are mistaken. I was not reading this evening; I read a page—no more; nor, to say the truth, do I imagine that you have been reading much yourself.

For the last week, I have noticed the progress of your marker through the philosophical treatise in your hands; you have travelled exactly twelve pages, which makes less than two pages an evening."

Nathalie hastily closed the volume.

"Now," resumed Monsieur de Sainville, "if you were not so proud, you would long ago have asked me for something to read more interesting than that Jansenist Nicole. Since you do not seem to be aware of it, I assure you I have a well-stocked library, and if you will only——"

"Armand," feebly said the voice of Madame Marceau, "why are you in the dark?"

"Lest the lamp should annoy you, Rosalie; we will have it lit now."

He rang the bell as he spoke; the servant entered; and the lamp was lit.

"And you actually remained in the dark all this time, on my account?" resumed Madame Marceau, addressing her brother, who now stood by her couch, in the same languid tone.

"The room was not dark," said he, very briefly.

"True; besides you were always fond of sitting thus by the fire-side. Do not these evenings remind you of other evenings long ago, Armand?"

"Do you feel better?" abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"Much better; these evening slumbers compensate

for my bad nights : and did I not fear they inconvenienced you——”

“ If they did, I could leave the room.”

“ But it is like your kindness to stay. Dear Armand !” and Madame Marceau pressed the hand of her brother very gratefully. “ Oh ! and you, too, stayed, *chère Petite*,” she added, addressing Nathalie in a tone of surprise, and half-raising herself on one elbow to look at the young girl ; “ I thought you were gone to see my poor aunt, whilst I slept.”

Monsieur de Sainville looked at his sister ; the light of the lamp fell on her pale features, over which now lingered a forced smile that agreed little with the dark, feverish, and yet eager gleam of her sunken eyes. From her he glanced to Nathalie ; the same light fell on her countenance : she, too, was pale, but of the pallor that gives a more delicate and subdued grace. She had risen on being thus addressed, and now stood opposite him at the foot of the sick lady’s couch, eyeing her with a kind, compassionate glance, and smiling, as she answered, quietly :

“ I never imagined you would sleep so long ; but I am truly glad you did sleep : it will do you so much good.”

“ Yes, Petite, it will,” slowly answered Madame Marceau ; she gently drew Nathalie towards her, made her sit down on the edge of the sofa, and taking her hand, clasped it tenderly in hers, without seeming aware that by so doing she placed it almost into her

brother's hand, which she still detained. Monsieur de Sainville, who was eyeing the fire with a fixed and abstracted gaze, never moved or turned round. Nathalie looked somewhat disconcerted, and rose quickly.

"Had I not better go and see how your aunt is?" she asked.

"Yes, Petite; she will be very glad to see you."

The look of Madame Marceau followed the young girl out of the room; her brother never changed his attitude: the expression of his features was severe, and almost forbidding.

"She is my good angel," sighed his sister. He did not answer. "Do you not think so, Armand?" she added, after a pause.

"Think what, Rosalie?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, slowly turning round, and eyeing her quietly. "Does that lamp annoy you?" he added, as she shaded her eyes with her hand; "shall I move the screen?"

"If you please; the light is painfully bright."

"Well, Rosalie, what were you saying?"

"I was only talking about Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"And what of her?"

"She is a good child."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed, Armand, I do," said Madame

Marceau, turning quickly her pale eager face towards her brother.

“ Well, so do I,” he calmly answered.

There was a pause. Monsieur de Sainville had resumed his book ; Madame Marceau was tossing restlessly on her couch.

“ Armand,” she said, at length, “ you like frankness, do you not ?”

“ I do,” was the emphatic reply.

“ You will, therefore, not be offended at a plain question ?”

“ No, Rosalie, certainly not.”

“ Well, then, Armand, how do you like Mademoiselle Montolieu ?”

“ Very much,” was the unhesitating reply.

Madame Marceau looked at her brother, and gave a sigh of relief.

“ I am so glad—so very glad,” she said, laying some stress on the word ‘glad,’ because “ you see, I feared quite the contrary ;—indeed, I decidedly thought the contrary. I imagined that you found her light, frivolous, and capricious ; that you even thought her more heedless than her youth warrants : that you, so calm and grave, saw with displeasure those little manifestations of temper to which she is subject. I cannot tell you how glad I am to find that I was mistaken, which I was—was I not ?”

“ You certainly were mistaken.”

“ Well, Armand, you always spoke so very coldly of her.”

“ I am of a cold temperament.”

“ And rather severe. Now, I think the faults of a young girl ought to be treated with indulgence.”

“ Quite true,” quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville; “ severity towards youth is cruel.”

“ Besides,” resumed his sister, “ what are the faults of temper, when the heart is good?”

“ Nothing, indeed.”

“ Then you think she has faults of temper?” quickly said Madame Marceau.

“ I never said so, Rosalie. You remarked, ‘ What are faults of temper, when the heart is good?’ I replied, ‘ Nothing, indeed.’”

Madame Marceau pressed her hand to her forehead; she looked thoughtful.

“ Nothing,” she resumed; “ and yet, Armand, in a wife, for instance, temper is no trifle.”

“ Trifle!” seriously said Monsieur de Sainville; “ it is the very first thing to be studied.”

“ Do you think so?” inquired his sister, with an anxious look; “ is that your real opinion, Armand?”

“ My conscientious opinion, Rosalie,” was the grave reply.

“ And beauty. What do you think about beauty?”

“ In what sense do you mean?”

“ Why, beauty in a wife; do you think it a recommendation?”

“ It is an open question ; I have known men who would not marry a woman that was too handsome ; others who would have none but a pretty wife.”

“ Do you think Petite too handsome ?”

“ No, certainly not.”

“ And yet she is very pretty, Armand ?”

“ Precisely ; that is why I do not think her too handsome.”

“ Well, I must say I do not admire her unconditionally.”

“ Nor do I.”

“ She is very dark.”

“ She is decidedly dark.”

“ And that curl in her lip,—what does it mean ?”

“ Pride.”

“ You think so ?”

“ I am sure of it.”

“ But pride is a great sin ?” said Madame Marceau, with a look of concern.

“ One of the seven capital sins.”

Madame Marceau shook her head, and sighed.

“ *Mon Dieu !* Armand,” she gravely said ; “ you intrude a painful doubt on my mind ; faults of temper, beauty, and pride, are dangerous gifts, and form a dangerous dowry.”

“ Do you think so ?” asked Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

“ You think so, Armand, do you not ?” said his sister, turning towards him with an inquiring glance.

“ Not in the least.”

“ Then I must have misunderstood you ?”

“ Quite misunderstood me, Rosalie.”

“ Then, Armand, what do you think ?” she asked, with some asperity ; “ but, perhaps,” she added, in a smoother tone, “ you object to this question ?”

“ Not at all, I assure you. You say that temper, beauty, and pride are a dangerous dowry ; I do not think so : temper produces a piquant variety ; beauty is pleasant ; pride is irresistibly attractive.”

“ Well, to be sure, how I did misunderstand you !” observed Madame Marceau, using her vinaigrette, and speaking with a short laugh ; “ I quite thought you had said temper was the very first thing to be studied.”

“ Precisely,—studied ; I did not say avoided. No man has a right to expect that his wife shall be a mere machine ; let him, therefore, study her temper.”

“ And you do not think beauty dangerous ?”

“ I pity the man who thinks so ; I pity the man who, being free to choose between two women, equal in other respects, has not the heart to choose the handsomer one of the two.”

“ It would be very generous to take the plain one,” ironically said the lady.

“ It would be heroic, if done from a generous motive ; mean and paltry, if the act of fear.”

“ And you do not object to pride ?” continued Madame Marceau.

“ I do not, when it is tempered by gentler feelings; it may, indeed, lead to much that is foolish, but it also saves from much that is false and wrong.”

Madame Marceau did not answer; she had partly raised herself on her couch; a heap of cushions supported her; she looked flushed, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

“ I misunderstood, quite misunderstood,” she said, very briefly; “ it was my fault, no doubt, but still I perceive that I have been in the dark all along.”

Monsieur de Sainville turned quietly round, and eyed his sister with a grave and earnest glance.

“ I think,” he quietly observed, “ that you have at least been questioning me in the dark; the exact purport of your questions has so often escaped me, that I may have answered them imperfectly. I am sorry that I did not at first state plainly what I am going to state now.”

His sister said nothing, but she slowly turned round, and eyed him with a fixed and burning look; he continued, looking at her as he spoke:

“ Namely, that although I recognize in no person the right of questioning me, yet I am perfectly willing to answer any such questions as it shall please you to address to me, and I beforehand give you my word that, no matter what the subject may be, the answers shall be as full and explicit as even you can desire.”

Madame Marceau sank back on her seat, turned very pale, and applied her vinaigrette. Her brother

took no notice of her emotion, which subsided almost immediately. Far from seeming to wish to avail herself of the privilege awarded to her, she hastily exclaimed,—

“ My dear Armand, what new mistake is this? Is it possible you imagined me so indiscreet? I have, indeed, been mistaken, but very agreeably so. We agree where I thought we differed,—a true source of pleasure to me, for every day adds to my affection for Petite.”

She spoke with some warmth. He rose, and said quietly:

“ Then you have no question to ask of me?”

“ None, Armand; none,” was the hurried reply.

He left the room.

Five minutes had scarcely elapsed, when Nathalie entered. She looked at Madame Marceau; the lady was reclining in her old attitude. The screen shaded her face; Nathalie could not see whether she really slept or not. She concluded that she did, from her silence. Her step was light, and could scarcely be heard as she glided across the carpeted floor to resume her place; but instead of doing so, she paused near the table, within the brilliant circle of light shed by the lamp. The volume Monsieur de Sainville had been reading attracted her attention; she opened it: it was a collection of treatises on subjects of agriculture, commerce, and political economy. The young girl turned over a few pages, then laid down

the volume, with that curl of the lip which had attracted the notice of Madame Marceau. Her own book was lying near it; she also took it up; it opened at the last page she had been reading. She looked at it with a fixed, abstracted gaze,—scarcely the gaze of one who read; a faint tinge of colour rose to her cheek, and something like a smile broke over her features. At length, she closed the volume, and, turning round, beheld the pale face and glittering eyes of Madame Marceau looking at her over the screen. She could not repress a start; for though she often met that look, rendered more keen and fixed by the illness of her who gazed, it ever produced in her the same first impression of uneasiness,—an impression which she always inwardly reproved when it had subsided.

“I thought you were asleep,” said she, approaching the couch.

“No, I was not,” was the low reply.

“Do you feel unwell?” continued Nathalie; for the sick lady was ghastly pale.

“I am not well. I was looking at you: what were you reading?”

“Nicole’s Moral Essays.”

“Do you like it?”

Nathalie smiled demurely.

“No favourite, I see. Come and sit here, Petite, so that I may see you;—yes, so,” she added, as Nathalie sat down on the edge of her couch; and the

sick lady caressingly took one of the young girl's hands in both her own, and looked fixedly at the frank and open face before her. "You are fond of reading?" she resumed.

"Very fond indeed."

"And of reading by the fire-light: it is pleasant, is it not? Well, what are you looking at?" she added, as Nathalie turned round somewhat abruptly.

"Is not that fire burning low, madame?"

"But the room is warm, Petite; you surely do not feel cold, for you look quite flushed."

Nathalie did not reply.

"Armand likes it, too," abstractedly continued Madame Marceau; "as I dare say you have observed," she added, after a pause.

"No," hesitatingly replied Nathalie; "I had not observed,—I—I did not know."

"What! am I mistaken? Does he not sit reading there every evening?"

"I mean, madame, that I did not know Monsieur de Sainville liked it."

"He does, Petite,—he does," said the lady, in a low tone; "if he did not, would he stay here as he stays, evening after evening?"

Nathalie did not answer: she scarcely seemed to have heard Madame Marceau. She still sat on the edge of the couch; her left hand held by the sick lady, her right supporting her cheek; her look fastened on the fire, which, notwithstanding her

previous assertion, burned brightly, and seemed not on the point of dying away. She looked as she probably felt,—in a dreamy, abstracted, yet not unhappy mood,—the mood in which youth welcomes its bright fancies and still brighter hopes. The voice of Madame Marceau, always rich and harmonious, now strikingly so, and yet not without a touch of secret sadness, broke on her reverie.

“ It is a deep charm, that of old associations—deep, and yet sometimes exquisitely painful. I know not why a thought, or rather a remembrance, of the past has been haunting me the whole evening, ever since I awoke, and found the lamp unlit, and Armand sitting there reading by the fire-light, and as I had seen him many a time long ago; for it is with him an old and favourite habit.”

Nathalie looked up silently, but listened, as if bound by a spell.

“ Years have passed away, but the charm is still unbroken; the old habit endures. The hearth, that to others looks joyous and bright, is to me as a spot haunted for ever by a secret presence. Is it harsh to wish that the dead should be forgotten, and effaced from human memory? Yet, if I could, I would do this; and had I the power, the fabled Lethe should yield its deepest draught, and quench the fever of one wearied spirit.”

She no longer seemed to be addressing Nathalie, and spoke in a tone so low, that the young girl could

scarcely catch the last words, though, slightly bending forward, she listened with eager attention. She looked round, and gave Madame Marceau a searching but unavailing glance; the meaning of that face was not one she could read. There was a long silence. At length, Nathalie left the couch, drew a chair to the table, and resumed her book; but after reading a few pages with feverish haste, she closed the volume and took up her embroidery. It failed, however, in rivetting her attention; for ere long, she laid it by, rose from her seat, and went up to one of the window recesses. After remaining there some time, she returned to the fire-side, and standing on the hearth-rug, looked long and fixedly at the burning logs of wood. When she turned round, she again met the look of Madame Marceau, who seemed to be eyeing her attentively.

“Petite,” she softly said, “you do not look well this evening. I fear this is a very dull life you lead here. Alas! what has youth to do with those who have unhappily lost all sympathy with its feelings. My poor child! we are too old, too grave, too sorrowful for you.”

“Too sorrowful, madam!” said Nathalie with a faint smile, but a somewhat wistful and anxious glance.

“Yes, Petite, too sorrowful,” gravely replied the lady.

Nathalie looked at her almost inquiringly, but

Madame Marceau averted her glance and spoke no more. She retired early, supported out of the room by Amanda, and leaving the young girl alone as usual.

It was a habit she had taken since the illness of Madame Marceau ; there was for her a charm, deep, though undefined, in the solitary possession of that old drawing-room, where no one ever came after the sick lady had retired. In order to secure herself against intrusion, Nathalie had even asked and obtained, that the task of extinguishing the lamp, and of allowing the fire to die slowly away on the hearth, might be left to her care.

The most sociable minds, those whom the quick animated converse delights most, often turn to solitude, with feverish and impassioned longing. There was to Nathalie something painfully oppressive in the constant society of Madame Marceau. It was not that the lady spoke much, or that her discourse wearied—far from it ; she spoke little and seldom, on trite subjects ; but she was there, ever there, with her quick restless look still following every motion of her young companion ; and there came moments when Nathalie longed to be away, when she thought of dark and lonely places, as a prisoner thinks of escape and liberty—when her spirit literally thirsted for an hour's communion with solitude. When that hour came at length, she enjoyed it with a pleasure only the more keen from being so brief. There was an old arm-chair,

vast enough to contain her entirely ; she ensconced herself in its deep recesses, extinguished the lamp, buried her head in her hands, and listened to the dull monotonous sound of the winter rain pattering against the window-panes, or to the spirit voice of the wind, now low and deep like a stifled plaint, now rising loud and wrathful, as if holding angry contest with some foe like itself, mysterious and unseen. Sometimes a strange and not unpleasing fear came over the mind of the young girl : she looked up chill and shivering ; the fire was low, the room looked vast and indistinct, the ceiling seemed lost in its own height, the mirrors opened deep vistas into endless and mysterious chambers, extending far away, all filled with the same solemn and shadowy gloom. But Nathalie was not superstitious ; this obscurity awed but never terrified her ; she was indeed conscious of a slight degree of fear, but of a fear which she subdued, and which there was even a certain pleasure in thus subduing. Gradually the feeling vanished ; she thought no longer of falling rain or murmuring wind, of shadowy chambers and legendary lore, but she listened invariably to the wonderful and endless romance, which her own thoughts had framed from the dreams that haunt the brain and trouble the heart of longing and ardent youth. And every evening that tale, with its imaginary scenes, passions, and characters, became more deep and thrilling ; but on none did it seem to draw nearer to a close, as vague and mysterious as

the unknown future it shadowed forth to the dreaming girl.

But this evening was not spent like the rest : the lamp was not extinguished, the chair was not drawn forth. Nathalie sat on the couch where Madame Marceau had been reclining, and her look wandered slowly over the whole room, as if it were a place that look beheld for the first time. This quiet *salon* was very old ; it had known many guests—masters they might call themselves, and be called by others,—but what were they, save the guests of a few years, who silently departed one by one, to be replaced by other guests, whose sojourn was as brief, whose memory was as speedily forgotten ? This had been the scene of their chief passions—vanity and pride ; chief, but not all, for surely many a story of man's gentler feelings was linked with that old room, with that silent hearth near which Nathalie now sat, a lonely and dependant girl. She shaded her eyes with her hand ; broken words, whose meaning she had devined, hints which she had been apt to read, had long ago told her a tale which her own thoughts had since then repeated to her many a time, seldom so forcibly as now. A picture rose before her, greeting that inward eye, which may be the torment, as well as the bliss, of solitude ; and never did limner's art draw outlines more distinct, or paint hues more vivid. She saw the old hearth : the fire burned brightly ; it cast its changing light to the furthest end of the room—it illumined its

deepest recesses; but above all, it fell on two,—a youth and maiden, who both sat near it. Nathalie knew that pale and severe face, even though it was younger than now, with fewer lines of care on its brow, and something more kindly in its glance. And the maiden, too, she knew ; for her features, though never beheld by actual sight, were not yet unknown. She knew that serene brow, shaded by fair clustering hair ; those soft blue eyes, those parted and smiling lips, that neck of swan-like grace ; and never, as she sat there in the firelight glow, did fairer and more ideal vision greet a lover's enamoured gaze. Nor did he, who now looked on her, seem cold or unmoved ; words fell from his lips—words which she who looked on could never hear, strive as she would, but whose meaning she read in the maiden's downcast look and blushing cheek. Here the dream ceased abruptly.

“ I believe I have forgotten my book,” said a calm voice.

Nathalie looked up with a sudden start : it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had entered unheard, and now stood near the table on which lay the book he had been reading. He took it up, opened it, and marked some passages with a pencil. The perfect seriousness of his manner, as he stood there, wholly wrapt in his occupation, and without so much as looking towards her, at once restored Nathalie to composure. He at length closed the book, turned away from the table, but had not gone away more

than a few paces, when he came back again, and said :

“ Mademoiselle Montolieu, I have a favour to ask of you.”

Nathalie looked up.

“ A favour, sir?”

“ Yes, a favour ; but you must promise beforehand to grant it.”

“ No promise is needed, sir,” she ceremoniously replied ; “ since it must be something quite out of my power for me not to gratify you.”

“ Well, then,” said he, without seeming to heed her reserved manner, “ promise me that you will not remain so closely confined to this room as you have done of late. I have noticed with concern the change in your appearance ; you are now habitually pale, which is not natural to you : you are extremely pale this evening. Pray be careful ; it is at your age that the seeds of future disease are often unconsciously sown,—that the health, grace, and bloom of youth are often lost for ever.”

“ But I assure you, sir,” hesitatingly replied Nathalie, “ that I am not ill.”

“ No, you are not ; I know it : but you are preparing for ill health. When do you leave this room, seldom or ever ? I want your promise, your word, that this shall not continue.

Nathalie did not answer.

“ What ! do you refuse ?”

“No, sir.”

“Then will you give me your word to take a walk to-morrow?”

“Very well, sir; I give you my word that I will.”

She spoke in a low tone, without raising her look or changing her attitude; nor did he glance towards her. He stood on the hearth-rug, one elbow leaning on the low marble mantel-shelf; his look fixed on the mirror, which gave back the whole room from its furthest extremity to the motionless figure of the young girl. He eyed her thus somewhat thoughtfully. He was not in error, when he said that Nathalie was changed; she had grown both thin and pale, and as she sat there, the drooping languor of her attitude struck him forcibly. An anxious expression overspread his features; he seemed on the point of addressing her, when something he saw in the mirror attracted his attention.

“Come in,” said he so abruptly, that Nathalie looked up at once.

He had turned towards the door; the contraction of his brow, though slight, yet announced displeasure, as the door opened and admitted Amanda.

“Why did you not come in at once?” he briefly asked.

“I was afraid of disturbing monsieur,” replied Amanda, ever cool and self-possessed.

“Is Madame Marceau unwell?” inquired Nathalie, rising.

"No; madame was not worse, thank heaven. Madame had only left her vinaigrette, and sent her for it, lest she should want it in the night."

But the vinaigrette, though sought for everywhere in and under the couch, was not to be found.

"*Mon Dieu!*" observed Amanda, with great simplicity, "I should not wonder if it were in madame's room, after all."

Another fruitless search convinced the *femme de chambre* that such was the case, and with a neat little apology for her intrusion, she left the room. From the moment of her entrance Monsieur de Sainville had resumed his book, and he did not look up, either during the search, or after Amanda's departure. Nathalie, who felt slightly embarrassed by the continuance of his presence, resumed the search—which was not, however, very sincere—for the missing vinaigrette.

"Do not give yourself useless trouble," said Monsieur de Sainville, quietly looking up, "I now remember, that when I left my sister's room before coming down here to look for this book, I saw that vinaigrette lying on her dressing-table. Amanda will see it the first thing on going in."

Nathalie gave him a quick look of surprise, but his countenance was perfectly calm and composed: he closed his book and continued—

"I hope you will not forget your promise."

"No, sir, I shall not."

He bade her good evening, then suddenly came back, and observed :

“ But pray do not take too long a walk, Mademoiselle Montolieu; you are not very strong; besides, it is air, not fatigue, that you want.”

He was gone; the door closed behind him; his receding step was heard, then ceased; but Nathalie did not move from the spot where she stood, wrapt in a dream-like trance. She pressed her hand to her forehead, and sought to recall the picture his entrance had broken; but the outlines were indistinct and dim—the hues had faded away. Instead of the youth, she saw the serious, yet kind face which had looked on her awhile ago; the maiden who had seemed so fair, was now a pale vision, as colourless and dim as the past of which she formed a part. On that loneliness, erewhile so bright, had fallen the dark Lethe-like shadow of forgetfulness and the grave.

CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning was mild and sunny, and no sooner had Nathalie entered the drawing-room, than Madame Marceau said so, and urged her to take a walk. “It would do her so much good.”

Nathalie assented with some surprise at the unusual attention. Scarcely had she left the room, when Monsieur de Sainville received a message from his sister, who wished to speak to him. When he came, she apologized in a tone of concern, “for interfering with his morning walk, for she knew this was his hour; but she wished to speak to him on a matter of interest;” and again she apologized “for preventing his morning walk.”

“As I am going to Marmont, it is of no consequence,” said he, taking a seat and assuming a listening attitude.

But the communication Madame Marceau had to make to her brother will appear afterwards.

Before proceeding to the garden, Nathalie called on her old friend. She found her disconsolate and shivering by the fire-side.

“What a mild, sunny morning!” cheerfully said Nathalie.

“Mild! All the mild weather was gone for ever. The world was getting older every day, and as for the sun——”

Nathalie interrupted her by drawing back the curtain, and the sun poured in a light so radiant, and a warmth so genial and penetrating, that the Canoness, fairly beaten on that point, retrenched herself within the position, “that the world was growing older and older every day.”

Nathalie placed on the little table, by Aunt Radegonde’s arm-chair, a vase full of fresh spring flowers; mute yet eloquent protests of the ever-renewed life and freshness of nature.

“They will die,” said the Canoness; “everything must die; it is not only older the world gets, but more dismal every day.”

Nathalie began to sing a gay Provençal song,—gay, yet not without a touch of old romance. The sounds stirred the emulation of Aunt Radegonde’s canary, which raised its voice in loud and angry rivalry. Amused at the contest, Nathalie quickened her singing; but the faster she sang the faster did the canary

pour forth his notes in brilliant succession, until at length the Provençal song was finished, and, in his own esteem, the bird remained victor.

“ There !” cried Nathalie, turning her flushed face and sparkling eyes towards the Canoness ; “ the sunshine, the flowers, the very bird himself, bear witness against you.”

“ Oh ! Petite, it is you, who are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in a house,” the Canoness observed ; and the unnatural gloom which had of late overcast her features, gradually left them as she looked at the young girl, with her brow so clear, her look so hopeful, her smile so bright, and around her lingering still all the delightful warmth and radiance of her years. She would have added, “ happy he who shall have so gay and cheerful a creature !” had she not felt checked by the memory of her anti-matrimonial exhortations.

“ And the book, Marraine ?” coaxingly said Nathalie.

“ Yes, I have looked for it, and there it is on the table. It was Armand’s copy once, and he was very fond of it, as I told you ; but it puzzles me to think why you care for such dry reading.”

“ I have long wished to read it,” said Nathalie, eagerly slipping a small duodecimo into her pocket.

“ Well, you may have it; I should not lend you a novel ; but maxims can do you no harm.”

The face of the Canoness fell when she perceived

that the young girl was not going to stay ; but she was comforted when Nathalie kissed her, and promised to call in the evening.

The morning was lovely, the garden looked green and beautiful, and, as Nathalie ran lightly down the gravel-walks, she wondered in her heart if Aunt Radegonde spoke truly : if the world was indeed growing old ! To her it had never seemed so fresh and young as on that spring morning. After wandering a long time over the garden and the grounds, she came to the green-house. It was Monsieur de Sainville's favourite resort, but the hour for his walk was past ; Nathalie, therefore, lingered there without fear of meeting him.

After admiring, leisurely, the fresh and fragrant flowers gathered together, she sat down on the low stone seat afforded by the embrasure of the arched window. It had been partly opened to admit the genial breath of noon-day to the flowers and plants within ; an almond-tree growing outside intercepted the sunbeams, and threw its light waving shadow on the features of Nathalie, as she reclined back, looking idly out, watching the shadows that passed swiftly over the waving grass, and listening to the low voice of the wind passing through the rustling branches of the neighbouring pine-trees.

She had not been long thus when she suddenly remembered the book she had taken away. She quickly took it out, and looked eagerly over every

page; now pausing long over some passage, now passing on hastily, and still looking graver as she read. The volume which she thus perused on that spring morning was not one of those tales of love or wild romance, the delight of youth, and often, too, of maturer years, but one of the most dreary and mournful records ever yielded by the history and experience of a human heart,—the *Maxims of La Rochefoucauld*. A few of the maxims were underlined; three of those thus designated struck Nathalie:—

“A man may love like a madman, not like a fool.”

“There are few women whose merit outlives their beauty.”

“True love is like spirits: spoken of by all; seen by few.”

“What! still reading *Nicole*?” said the voice of Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie looked up; he stood smiling before her. She coloured; hastily jumped down from her seat, and in her haste dropped the book. He picked it up, and immediately looked up into her face, with a glance both searching and surprised.

“*La Rochefoucauld!* you read *La Rochefoucauld!* And the copy looks well worn,—a favourite author, no doubt. Oh! you true daughter of Eve! could you not wait for such bitter fruit?”

There was slight bitterness in his tone, as he spoke thus, turning over the pages of the volume. Something he saw struck him.

“ Where did you get this book, child ? ” he asked, in a wholly altered tone.

“ From Madame de Sainville, sir.”

“ My aunt ! A strange relic for her to keep, and a strange book to lend to you.” He very deliberately put the volume into his pocket, looked up, and steadily eyeing Nathalie, said, in a tone between jest and earnest :

“ I confiscate *La Rochefoucauld*. Though this copy has not been in my hands for years, it is nevertheless my property ; besides, I do not wish you to read it. For heaven’s sake, keep to all that girls delight in ; leave *La Rochefoucauld* to graver heads, older minds, and sadder hearts. Keep, I pray, to novels and poetry,—the proper food of eighteen.”

A disdainful smile curled Nathalie’s lip, as she replied :

“ Novels, poetry, and so forth are the sweetmeats, the *bonbons* fit for us poor girls of eighteen ! How flattering ! ”

“ You crave stronger food ? Be satisfied, you shall have it soon,—much too soon.”

She did not answer. He continued :

“ I have deprived you of your book : allow me then to send you something from my library this afternoon.”

“ Novels and poetry ? ” demurely asked Nathalie.

“ Yes ; novels and poetry. Do you imagine I

never read either? Why, the intellectual repast must always have a dessert."

"And the dessert is, of course, fit for a girl of eighteen!" observed Nathalie, in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nay, as to that, you may have all, if you like. Do you incline towards political economy, or take any interest in agriculture? Are you pleased with statistics? Pray choose. I regret not to possess any interesting works on history, or some amusing books of travel; but I have little faith in historical lore, and have travelled too much myself to care about the travelling experiences of others. My books are thus either very grave or very light. Which do you prefer?"

"Whichever you please, sir. Some interesting discussion on the manufacturing system; or on the best method of fattening cattle; or on the present plan of cultivating land in small farms;—anything, in short, equally instructive, elevating, or delightful."

"You are resentful. Seriously, did you like La Rochefoucauld so very much?"

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders carelessly; "she did know; she had not read much."

"Did you wish to read more?"

She felt perfectly indifferent on that subject.

"I am glad to hear you say so. This book, true in some respects, false in others, could only taint the freshness of your mind. Had I simply warned you

against it, you would have sat up all night, sooner than leave it unread. I took it into custody at once ; for I know that you have too daring and inquiring a spirit to be deterred by trifles ;—witness the adventure of the berries."

She did not reply. She stood before him, with blushing and half-averted face ; one hand supporting her cheek, the other stripping a fine laurel of its leaves. He stood between her and the door, and seemed to enjoy her embarrassment. There was a brief silence.

" What are you doing to my poor laurel ?" he suddenly exclaimed.

Nathalie started, turned round, and seeing the floor covered with the leaves of the injured shrub, she looked up, with a frightened glance, into Monsieur de Sainville's face. He assumed a displeased air ; and she tried to look remorseful.

" Do you use shrubs thus ?" he asked ; " if so, how shall I protect mine ?"

" Lock the door, sir."

She glided past him, and stepped out, as she spoke.

" Judicious advice, which cannot too soon be followed," he replied, following her out, and locking the door of the green-house.

Nathalie looked disconcerted, as he composedly walked by her side. In her first moment of confusion, she had not taken the path leading to the château, but a sheltered avenue of firs, in a contrary

direction. The ground was bare of grass, but the fallen foliage of the firs rendered it as soft and warm as a carpet; golden gleams lit up the dark trunks and darker masses of those northern trees, in harmony with the chillness latent in the air of this spring morning. Seeing that her companion did not speak, Nathalie resolutely opened the conversation by alluding to the beauty of the weather,—that fertile topic in doubtful climates. He smiled, but did not answer.

“There is something very pleasant in the quiet freshness of Normandy,” she continued.

“You like Normandy?” said he, with a keen, inquiring glance; “you,—a native of the south, accustomed to a warm sun, and its deeper dyes;—you admire our green little province, so calm, so commonplace?”

Nathalie looked surprised at this slighting tone.

“I understand,” he resumed, interpreting the expression of her countenance with his usual ease; “why do I stay in a place about which I seem to care so little? Well, if I remain here, it is not precisely because I like Normandy, or even Sainville, though both are endeared to me by family recollections; it is because I know, my child, that it is good for the home of man to be like his happiness,—common-place and calm. Have you read enough of La Rochefoucauld to agree with me there?”

Nathalie did not choose to answer the latter remark.

“ Normandy is beautiful,” she said ; “ yet I should prefer a purer sky and a warmer sun.”

“ You like the south : so do I ; but not to reside in. That endless revel of nature, with skies ever blue, and air ever balm, enervates the soul. Man is not himself, when he has nothing against which he may strive. Life is not, or should not be a day of summer sunshine, to be spent in voluptuous enjoyment. Have you never, in imagination, contrasted a soft southern climate with the desolate north, with icy seas blending at the horizon with skies scarcely less black ? Have you not thought of those solitary and rock-bound shores, of those wild and barren regions seen through the falling snow ; where the sun looks pale and dim as the moon of our temperate regions, where a plant can hardly grow, and man can scarcely dwell, but which have a solemn and melancholy charm that lives in the memory, when the verdant earth, the serene sky, and azure seas of the south are forgotten ? ”

He spoke with a fervour verging on enthusiasm.

Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

“ It must be very cold there, sir,” she said, with a slight shiver ; “ I like the sun—the sun of the south, I mean.”

“ That is to say, not the sun of our poor Normandy.”

Nathalie did not answer.

“Now, seriously,” he continued, “what is there amiss with our province? Its verdure is noted; it is a green, pleasant nook enough; and if the sky is sometimes overcast, there are plenty of dwellings to give shelter. Take Sainville, for instance; you like Sainville, do you not?” he abruptly added.

“Yes, sir,” she replied, somewhat coldly; “I like it.”

“But not too much, evidently. Is it the château you object to?”

“No, sir; the château is very fine.”

“You speak quite coolly; what is there amiss in that poor château?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“And what have you to say to the garden, or to the grounds?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“Nothing! Oh! my child, do not say that. Like Sainville,—I want you to like it.”

He spoke with so much warmth, that he stopped short. He took her hand, and looked down at her eagerly. She turned very pale, and trembled visibly. He smiled.

“Do not look so frightened,” said he, gently; “but come in here: I want to speak to you.”

A spell seemed on Nathalie: she yielded like a child, as he made her enter the recess of the sleeping nymph, which they were just then passing by. On

seeing where they were, he stopped short, released her, and cast a gloomy look around him.

“Oh! Petite, Petite!” he bitterly said, “what brought us here?”

“Is not this a pretty place?” asked Nathalie, endeavouring to look composed.

At first he did not reply.

“You like it!” he said, at length; “do not; the shadow of death is on it—a shadow nothing can remove. Look at that nymph! Hers is no earthly sleep—it is the sleep of the funereal genius I once saw on an ancient tombstone in Italy, and whose brow, though wreathed with flowers, looked oppressed with something more heavy than mere slumber. You like the sun. When does it penetrate through those yews and cypresses—fit trees for what is little better than a tomb?”

He spoke with impatient bitterness. There was a long pause, broken by no sound save the low splash of the fountain. Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville, at the nymph in her ivied niche; she listened to the low murmurs of the falling waters, and seemed to be eagerly seeking, from all she saw and heard, the key of some half-devined mystery.

“Yes, I like this place,” she observed, at length.

“It does not sadden or oppress you?”

“No; why should it?”

“True; why should it? And yet the eternal splash of that fountain is strangely monotonous, and

the breath it sends upon the air is very chill. See, your hair is covered with spray."

"I find it cooling to the brow, and pleasant to the ear."

"But it will end by depressing you at length."

"I am not easily depressed."

"No, poor child! I dare say you have made the best of the little happiness that came in your way."

He was looking at her kindly, yet sadly.

"It is so difficult to be miserable for a long time," she said.

"Yet you had your troubles?"

"Hope upheld me with a nameless trust in some unknown good still to come."

"It was not hope: it was the freshness of your years; the inexperience of youth, which knows not life for what it is: a weary burden—a dark captivity."

"I do not believe that, at all!" cried Nathalie; "it is too hard to believe," she added, colouring at the vivacity with which she had spoken.

"Ay, hard, indeed—but too true."

"But surely, sir," said Nathalie very earnestly, "there is such a thing as happiness?"

He did not reply.

"However brief it may be," she continued, hesitatingly.

"And what happiness can be called genuine, that does not endure? From the moment we know it

must end with life, is not the longest happiness miserably brief? Oh! that thought that all must die and everything perish! Like the skeleton guest of Egypt's ancient banquets, it haunts every mortal festivity."

He spoke sorrowfully. Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

"Why should one look at that skeleton, or think of death?" she asked in a low soft tone. "It is of itself so hard to believe in, so easy to forget. Oh! when the sun shines so brightly, when the air is so pure, the sky so blue, the whole earth so fair, may not one sometimes imagine, looking at that beautiful universe, of which, however insignificant, we yet form a part,—why should it not endure thus for ever?"

She looked at him; he drew her arm within his.

"My poor little thing," said he, "death will overtake you as it overtakes us all; with years that pass like days, and treacherous stealthy steps that fall on the ear unheeded and unheard. Fresh and fair as you are now, you too must share the fate of earth's most glorious and most lovely things; you too must pass away and fade, and die."

The low and mournful cadence of his voice thrilled through the heart of Nathalie. She looked up into his face with a fixed glance and parted lips, in a sort of serious and rapt attention. Far from saddening her, his words had only brought a deeper hue to her cheeks and a softer light to her eyes; there seemed

to be for her joy, and no gloom in the mournful images he had called up. She smiled to herself, like one who beholds some fair inward vision.

“No matter,” said she, pressing her hands to her bosom, whilst the smile still lingered on her lips; “no matter; there is happiness still!”

“I hope so,” he replied in his usual tone. “But you are shivering; it must be this chill place.”

He led her away; they ascended the flight of steps in silence; he paused before a sunny bench on the first terrace.

“Let us sit here,” he said, “and continue our argument. Why do you not like Sainville?”

“I never said I did not like it, sir,” replied Nathalie, startled at this abrupt remark.

“But you spoke very coldly. Look at it! Does not the old château look warm and bright in the sunshine, with the blue sky beyond? If you were to live here long, would you always be regretting Provence? Believe me, forget Arles; and like Sainville.”

“I like Sainville, sir.” She spoke so low that the words were wellnigh inaudible. They both sat on the bench, he stooped to hear her better, when a discreet cough in the neighbouring alley announced the approach of Amanda.

A mutual impulse made them rise. Nathalie became crimson. Monsieur de Sainville looked pale and angry. The lady’s maid came up with a thick shawl on her arm. “Madame fearing lest made-

moiselle should take cold on this chill morning, had told her to bring her this."

"Rosalie is thoughtful," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; "and now that you have that shawl, will you not take another turn around the garden?"

He took her arm as he spoke; but Nathalie disengaged it quickly. She coloured, hesitated, stammered, and at length replied that she felt tired and would rather go in. He did not seem quite pleased, but raised no objection. He went in through the library. She entered the château by the front entrance, and immediately proceeded to the drawing-room.

"Have you had an agreeable walk?" asked Madame Marceau. She had half-raised herself on one elbow to look at Nathalie. The shawl had fallen back, and no longer concealed her figure, once so full and stately, now shrunk and wasted by disease. The curtains of the drawing-room shut out the clear light as usual, but their crimson hue fell in vain on her pale features, rendered more pale by the feverish glitter of her sunken eyes.

"Yes, madame, a very agreeable walk," replied Nathalie.

"But solitary. What a pity!"

"I met Monsieur de Sainville," said Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Indeed! I thought him at Marmont. Where did you meet him?"

“ In the green-house.”

“ His favourite resort: yours, too, I suppose?”

“ By no means,” drily replied the young girl.

“ Well, Petite, do not put on that serious face. Just lay by your work, and let me look at you. Ay, so. I have a question to ask: what did Armand say to you?”

She again raised herself on one elbow. Nathalie coloured deeply, and looked disturbed; but she did not reply.

“ I thought so!” indignantly exclaimed the lady, sinking back on the couch. “ Well,” she sharply added, “ you do not answer!”

“ I might refuse to answer,” said Nathalie, rather haughtily; “ but it is not worth while. Monsieur de Sainville spoke to me only on the most general subjects.”

“ And on none in particular?”

“ Oh! yes,” negligently replied Nathalie; “ on the north, the south, and so on.”

“ What do you mean by so on?” asked Madame Marceau, with a short laugh.

Nathalie looked up, so flushed and irritated, that the lady softened down immediately.

“ Petite,” she said, “ you are vexed. I will make no apologies; but put your hand here,”—she took her hand, and laid it on her heart, as she spoke,—“ and here,” she added, making her feel her hot and throbbing wrist; “ then ask yourself if the fever,

which wastes life at that rate, leaves the mind calm, and the temper smooth?"

"You have a strong fever; let me send for the doctor," exclaimed Nathalie, appeased at once.

"I am not ill; mine is a fever of the mind no doctor's art can appease. I was very absurd awhile ago; but when I learned you had met Armand, I concluded he had been repeating to you what passed between him and me, just before he went to the garden."

"I am not in Monsieur de Sainville's confidence," gravely replied Nathalie.

"But if what passed between us was about you?"

"About me!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Come, I see he has been discreet. So much the better. Men mar where they meddle. Do not look so disturbed; I cannot explain myself for a few days yet. This much I can tell you: Armand makes me miserable. We never quarrel; but we are always jarring. But why should I complain? He is to me what he has been to every one—to himself first of all—inexorable. I am ambitious; it is in our race. Yes," she added, with her old pride rising, "ambition and will are in the blood of the Sainvilles. Have I not that for which I may well be aspiring? You have seen my son; he is young, handsome, and full of talent. Think you he would not make a fit representative of the old family honours? Come, be frank,"

she added, with a penetrating glance ; “do you not think he would ?”

Nathalie looked embarrassed, in spite of herself.

“ Child,” returned Madame Marceau, smiling, “ why do you blush ? What mother can resent that which she herself feels so deeply ? We will have no explanations,” she added, perceiving that Nathalie looked disturbed ; “ I proceed. Do you not think my son would bear the old name with all due honour ? You do ; but his uncle, but my brother,” she added, with much bitterness, “ does not.”

Nathalie had too long suspected this, to look surprised.

“ You do not seem astonished,” suspiciously said the lady ; “ then he has told you after all ! Come, confess it.”

“ Madame,” replied Nathalie, in an accent that carried conviction with it, “ he has never even hinted this to me.”

“ Forgive me, Petite ; I am strangely sensitive on this point. But to return. Do you think my ambition, hope, dream,—call it what you will,—so extravagant ? Could not that which has been done for the most noble families of France, be done for ours ? We should have no Rohans, no Richelieus, if the salic system had been carried out. Did not the niece of the great Cardinal marry her music-master ? and the last daughter of the Rohans fall in love with Chabot, the cadet of Gascony, and by marrying him,

perpetuate a name otherwise doomed to extinction? But reason, example, and argument have proved unavailing; he has refused—absolutely refused. And on what plea?—why, on the plea that the name he has, by so much sacrifice and labour, saved from disgrace, shall not be perilled again!"

She ceased. A crimson spot burned on her pale cheek: she looked feverish and excited. Nathalie, who had heard her with deep attention, now said, quietly :

" But how can Monsieur de Sainville prevent his name from being perilled again? If he should marry, for instance?"

Madame Marceau turned slowly round on her couch, looked at the young girl's attentive face, smiled, turned back again, and muttered to herself, " Marry! Armand marry! Petite," she resumed, in her usual tone, " you surprise me! I thought every one knew my brother would not marry. You may imagine that if I did not know this, as I know it, I should never have hinted to him the propriety of my son assuming a name which would have been the exclusive right of his own children. And so," she added, turning round again, and giving the young girl a fixed and piercing gaze, " so you really did not know, or even suspect, that Armand would never marry?"

Nathalie did not answer.

" How strange!" continued the lady, laughing, and seeming much amused; " excuse me, Petite; but the

idea of Armand marrying, is to me so peculiar. Very." She laughed again. "And so," she resumed, when this mirthful fit was over, "so you never noticed his constrained politeness to us poor women! So you never noticed how he sneers at our little follies; how impatient he is of our weakness: how little he cares to disguise his real opinion of us—namely, that we are weak, frivolous, inconstant, incapable of real or high feeling—toys to be trifled with in a light or idle hour: no more? And so you never noticed how he mocks at love and marriage, and so forth; and yet you have been here a whole winter, *Petite?*"

Nathalie remained silent.

"You see," said Madame Marceau, "it was my knowledge of this solemn vow—and when was Armand ever known to break his word—that made me hope. But when I mentioned this to him this morning, he destroyed that hope at once, by merely saying, 'No, I must be the last of the name.' But I must and will be just: Armand spoke very kindly of Charles, more kindly than I could have expected. 'Of course,' he said, 'he shall be my heir; let this comfort you, Rosalie. I hope he has too much good sense to care about the name of De Sainville; at all events, I know a way to render the disappointment less bitter. I have been a cold, stern uncle till now, but I may befriend him in a manner he little expects.' But how pale and languid you look,

Petite! I fear you are not well ; you are too much shut up—you want long walks, like this morning. I hope you will continue to like Sainville : we want you to like it. Let me tell you that you are a great favourite. Ah ! if you knew the plans we have been making to prolong your sojourn here ?”

Nathalie rose abruptly ; she turned pale and flushed by turns ; she fastened a searching and burning look on the sick lady.

“ Madame,” she exclaimed, “ do you mean to say that Monsieur de Sainville meant——”

“ Do you expect me to tell you that ?” gaily interrupted the lady, with a playful wave of the hand ; “ no, Petite, woman as I am, I can keep a secret.”

Nathalie sat down, but she soon rose again ; she looked disturbed and anxious. Madame Marceau laughed, and asked if she did not think herself the victim of some deeply-laid scheme ? In vain the young girl sought to ascertain anything positive ; she only received hints as vague and delusive as the gleams of light that glance on the changing wave. She felt dazzled, but never enlightened.

This lasted the whole day, for Madame Marceau would not allow her to leave her. Towards evening she fell into her usual slumber. Nathalie sat near her, alone. The lamp was not lit ; but the curtains had been drawn back from the central window, whose wide arch framed a quiet picture of the summits of dark trees, that seen thus, looked like the outskirts

of some forest solitude. Above, in the blue silent sky, hung the moon, the votive lamp of nature's wide temple suspended there throughout eternity. The room was still; a soft pale light fell on the floor: the evening was mild—the fire burned low, with a faint smouldering light. Nathalie felt oppressed and weary; she turned towards the quiet scene which the window revealed—it looked a calm, peaceful region there, delusive she knew, for it was only the dusty road that spread beyond, and yet even that delusion soothed her. The words of David, “Oh! that I had the wings of a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest,” came back to her heart. For awhile a dream bore her away on its swift pinions; the freshness of dark places seemed to fall on her wearied spirit; the cool drink of some icy fountain wave, to soothe her inward fever. She rose softly, and glanced towards Madame Marceau. The invalid did not move; her breathing remained regular and low: she complained of restless nights, but her evening sleep was always heavy and deep. Nathalie had all day been longing to go up to Aunt Radegonde; she now thought she could escape unheard, and return before she had been missed. She glided softly towards the door, opened it, closed it noiselessly, and found herself face to face with Monsieur de Sainville, on the landing. She wanted to pass by him; he detained her.

“Why did you not come down to dinner?” he asked.

“ Madame Marceau made me dine with her.”

“ What is the matter? Your voice does not sound as usual; has there been anything to trouble or annoy you?”

His tone was brief, his look keen and penetrating; she averted her face without replying.

“ Let me know what it is, I beseech you.”

His voice was unusually kind and soothing. Tears trembled on the lashes of her downcast eyes.

“ Let me know it, I beseech you,” he said again, lowering his voice so that no passing servant might overhear his tones.

Before Nathalie could reply, the drawing-room door opened, and Madame Marceau appeared, with her pale face and glittering eyes on the threshold. The subdued light of the lamp, held by the marble slave, shone on their three faces.

“ Petite,” said she, in a brief abrupt tone, taking Nathalie’s arm as she spoke, “ why did you leave me? you know I have a horror of remaining alone ever since I am ill.”

“ And you are ill, very ill to night,” observed her brother, with something between anger and pity on his countenance, as he watched her agitated face and trembling frame,—“ come in, Rosalie.”

He made her release her hold of Nathalie, took her arm and led her into the drawing-room, closing the door behind him. Nathalie went up to the *boudoir* of the Canoness.

“ Oh, Petite ! how glad I am you are come,” eagerly said Aunt Radegonde; “ I have been so dull, but now I shall be all right again; for you know what I said this morning: you are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in a house.”

The young girl smiled faintly, but silently sat down on a low stool at the feet of her old friend. Five minutes elapsed; she did not open her lips. The Canoness stooped, made her raise her face so that it met her own attentive gaze, and exclaimed,—

“ How pale you are !”

“ I have a bad head-ache.”

There was another long silence.

“ Marraine,” suddenly observed Nathalie, “ is it true that Monsieur de Sainville has taken a vow never to marry ?”

Her look was rivetted on the features of Aunt Radegonde. She dropped her knitting and turned very pale; her features worked, her lips trembled, and her eyes dimmed with tears.

“ Yes,” she replied in a broken tone, “ he has taken a vow never to marry.”

Nathalie rose much disturbed; her features were scarcely less agitated than those of Aunt Radegonde. She walked up and down the room with hasty and uneven steps: at length she paused near the chair of the Canoness, and gently laying her hand on the arm of her old friend, she said, in a remorseful tone,—

“ I have been cruel,—forgive me.”

“ My poor child, you could not know all that such a question called up.”

“ Yes, yes, I know it,” exclaimed the young girl, in a broken tone; “ I know it but too well,”

The Canoness wheeled back her chair to see her better.

“ Petite,” she said, “ you mistake; you know nothing.”

“ Nothing !” bitterly replied Nathalie, and she clasped her hands, and again walked up and down ths room.

“ Petite, what do you know?”

Nathalie shook her head without replying. A hectic flush overspread the features of Aunt Radegond.

“ You must tell me, you must,” she exclaimed with unusual warmth.

“ And where shall I find the words that will not grieve you?” asked Nathalie with deep sadness. “ How shall I say that I know the sad story of one whose image is in this room, who was lovely, and destined to happiness, and who suffered so much through another, who is also dear to you.”

“ He is not, he is not!” passionately cried the Canoness; “ I have never forgiven him in my heart; I never will forgive him. I hate myself sometimes for residing under his roof and eating his bread; yes, I hate myself, I do.”

Nathalie eyed her with a troubled look. There is

something strange and impressive in the impotent wrath of age,—that last lingering spark of a dying fire. On seeing the gentle Canoness so strangely moved, the young girl began to understand the strength and depth of the resentful feeling which had slumbered all along,

“ Do you know,” continued the Canoness, in the same excited tone, “ that she was dear to me as mine own child ; that she was a poor motherless orphan ; the daughter of a loved and only sister ; that I brought her up here in this house, and that for sixteen years she never left me. That she was beautiful as the day, and the gentlest creature that ever lived ; that to see her was to love her, and that but for one hard heart she might be with us still,—a joy to all, a blessing to me. You weep ; you feel for her. God bless your kind heart ;—say, was not her’s a hard fate ? He came back in time ; her father relented, but *he* would not ; his pride—that pride which will bring down a judgment on him yet—would not let him relent or forgive. He allowed her to be married to another almost before his eyes. She died of a broken heart ; he lived on calm, prosperous, and happy.”

The colour had repeatedly changed on Nathalie’s cheek as she listened to Aunt Radegonde. Her hands were nervously clasped together ; her look was feverish ; in a voice she vainly strove to render calm, she said, “ How do you know he is happy ? how do you know he does not suffer ? ”

The Canoness gave her a dreary look.

“To suffer, he should have a heart, and it is not a heart he has, but a stone. I always warned my poor child not to like him; but youth is rash and she would not be warned. She might have found many another suitor, for she was very lovely. That portrait is her very image. Look at her! My aunt Adelaide was beautiful, no doubt, but never half so beautiful as my own Lucile. She never had that fine silken hair my hand has smoothed and caressed so often; she never had those soft blue eyes that have looked up into mine with a smile,—many, oh! many a time.”

She ceased; her tears were falling fast. Nathalie looked at the two portraits: at the dark and at the fair beauty; at the face that had the colouring rich, warm, and yet soft of some old Venetian master; at the other calm countenance, with the lovely, but pale outlines of a Raffaelle head. She compared them: Adelaide de Sainville looked very beautiful, but when she turned from her to the serene face, it seemed as if that bewitching, but still earthly beauty faded away as mortal and perishable, before the pure and ideal loveliness of Aunt Radegonde’s lost niece.

“Oh, Marraine!” she exclaimed, in a low tone, “if he does not suffer, remember, and regret, why that vow?”

“Pride, child,—pride. Once deceived by woman, he will not be deceived a second time.”

“Hush,” quickly said Nathalie.

Her ear had detected the well-known step; the door opened, Monsieur de Sainville entered. The Canoness looked disconcerted; Nathalie agitated. He eyed them keenly from the threshold of the room; closed the door deliberately; came forward and excused himself in his customary calm tone, for not having warned his aunt of his visit.

“It is no matter, Armand — no matter,” she replied; but her voice quivered, and her hands trembled as she resumed her knitting.

Her nephew glanced from her to Nathalie. The young girl had risen; she avoided his look, took up a book lying on the table, turned over a few pages, closed it, and left the room without speaking.

“Aunt,” abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville, “what is the matter with Mademoiselle Montolieu?”

“She has a bad headache.”

“Nothing else?”

His look was piercing; but the Canoness calmly replied ·

“No, Armand, nothing else that I know of.”

“There is something going on to-day in this house, which I cannot understand,” he said impatiently. “What is it? You look surprised. Well, I dare say you know nothing about it. Listen to this, however: Petite is unwell; she wants a walk, make her —you can if you wish—take one to-morrow.”

“Certainly, Armand,” answered the Canoness, with much alacrity, for she felt this concern in one

whom she loved, soothing and complimentary. As a sort of *amende honorable* for the harsh feelings she had been cherishing against him, she added, “and I am very much obliged to you, Armand, for the interest you take in Petite.”

A peculiar smile played around the pale firm lips of Monsieur de Sainville as he received these thanks, and looked down at the little, but erect figure of his aunt.

“Petite!” he echoed, “what tempted you to call her so; she is not short?”

“No, certainly; but there is something slight and airy about her. She is not one of those women, for instance, who fill a room; a sort of woman I never could endure,” emphatically added the Canoness.

“Petite,” as you call her, “is certainly not one of those ample ladies; but she can fill a room with noise. Was it not her I heard singing here this morning, or Amanda, perhaps?”

“Amanda!” indignantly exclaimed his aunt; “do you imagine, Armand, I would allow my niece’s *femme de chambre* to sing in my room, in my presence?”

“I thought you liked that girl,” replied her nephew, eyeing her fixedly; “she is a good deal with you.”

“But I keep her at a distance,—at a great distance,” emphatically said his aunt.

“Then it was Mademoiselle Montolieu who sang?”

“ Yes, she was as merry as a bird this morning; but this evening she scarcely opened her lips.”

“ She is not well; I saw it at once,” returned Monsieur de Sainville, with a brief expression of anxiety. “ I hope you will tell her to take a walk to-morrow morning.”

“ Be quite easy, Armand,” said the Canoness, with a shrewd nod; “ I shall tell her to walk up and down by the river-side; there is a fine breeze there.”

“ A great deal too fine,” quickly replied her nephew; “ besides there are workmen engaged there now; it would annoy her.”

“ Then I shall make her promise to keep to the first terrace, where the sun is so warm.”

“ Let her choose her own walk, aunt,” he said, somewhat impatiently, “ she will enjoy it more.”

There was a pause; Monsieur de Sainville bade his aunt good night, walked to the door, and suddenly came back; he drew La Rochefoucauld from his pocket, and put it on the table.

“ I found Mademoiselle Montolieu reading this book this morning,” he said, briefly; “ I took it from her; it seemed a pity that the freshness of so young a mind should be tarnished by such bitter lore. Why did you not lend her some tale, or novel, aunt?”

“ A tale, a novel! Armand; and to a young girl?”

“ Why not?” he composedly asked; “ I suppose that no tale or novel in your possession would be unfit for her reading! And I believe it is for youth those books are most proper.”

“ That is not my creed,” firmly said the Canoness.

“ Aunt, novels are very harshly treated; they are simply a want of our imaginative faculties, which must and will be satisfied. Youth must have romances, or, what is far more dangerous, it will make to itself romances of its own. But that is not the question; I return this book to you because it is from you it was had; it was mine formerly, but I do not value it now. *A propos,*” he carelessly added, “ you may induce Mademoiselle Montolieu to prolong her walk, by telling her that a fine azelia has arrived this afternoon, and is now in the greenhouse.”

“ An azelia!” cried the Canoness; “ well, then, I think I shall venture out with Petite to see the azelia.”

“ No, pray do not,” very quickly said her nephew; “ there is still a very keen breeze out.”

And when he again stood near the door, he turned round to say, very seriously,—

“ Aunt, promise me that you will not go out to-morrow.”

The Canoness gave the required promise.

“ He is kind, after all,” she thought, when her

nephew was gone, and willing to gratify him at once, she rang the bell. Amanda made her appearance.

“ I wish to see Mademoiselle Montolieu,” said the Canoness, in a distant tone, suggested by the recent conversation.

“ I am sorry to inform madame, that Mademoiselle Montolieu, being troubled with a bad headache, has retired to her room.”

“ Then I must see her when she comes down to-morrow morning. Mademoiselle Montolieu is my companion, and I must say I think the way in which my niece usurps her society is quite preposterous. I never can see her. I shall expect to see her to-morrow morning; I have an important communication to make to her. It is quite necessary Mademoiselle Montolieu should take exercise, and there is something in the green-house she is expected to go and look at. I must have a conversation with Mademoiselle Montolieu on that subject.”

And with a dignified wave of the hand Amanda was dismissed.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARTISTS have the privilege of forgetfulness, and Mademoiselle Amanda was, to use her own expression, "oblivious."

Thus, though she saw Nathalie on the following morning, and spoke for a full half-hour on various subjects connected with her art and the dulness of the château, she wholly forgot to deliver the message of the Canoness; through which piece of obliviousness the blossoms of the Azelia bloomed, withered, and fell unseen by Nathalie.

No sooner did the young girl come down to the drawing-room, than Madame Marceau declared she looked pale and unwell. "It was the dulness and seclusion of her existence was the cause of this. She wanted change. Why not go and spend the day, the whole day, with her sister?

Nathalie declined; but the lady was importunate:

she yielded. In another half-hour she was standing in the quiet court at the door of Madame Lavigne's dwelling. The place looked even more silent and lonely than usual in this soft April morning,—grey, humid, free from sunshine, but calm and mild, with the last lingering chillness of winter melting away before the genial breath of spring.

Rose was sitting alone. She greeted her sister quietly, but with a long earnest look she had often fastened on her of late. Nathalie shunned her glance, and took up the other end of the sheet Rose was hemming. But her portion of the task soon lay neglected on her lap; she reclined back in her chair, one hand supporting her cheek, her head slightly averted, her look fixed on the old tower opposite; she looked pale and thoughtful.

“What is the matter with you?” suddenly asked Rose.

“It is the weather,” slowly replied Nathalie, bending once more over her work. “I feel dreamy. There is in this cloudy sky, in this humid atmosphere, in this fine rain that scarcely moistens the earth on which it softly falls, in the mildness of the air, telling us spring has returned, something which quite unnerves my southern nature. I feel subdued, passive, and like one in a dream, but without the wish to waken; everything looks vague and scarcely real; thoughts come and lead me on I know not whither, nor how. If I were walking in the garden

now, I should go on without caring to stop; but sitting as I am here, looking at that old tower, and watching those cawing rooks, I feel as if I could remain thus all day long."

"You were not thus when you first went to Sainville!" ejaculated Rose.

"Perhaps not. I lived with children at Mademoiselle Dantin's; but it now seems as if I had passed the boundary of real life. I remember that time as something years ago,—far away in the past."

"Your life is too dull," returned Rose, anxiously.

"I do not find it so. I am getting a nun, like you, Rose; and I like the silence, I had well-nigh said, the solitude, of my convent."

"You must leave the château," urged Rose; "the object you had in remaining there is accomplished; you must leave it and seek some more active life."

"Leave, and fight alone this world's hard battles, Rose!" said Nathalie, with a mournful smile; "strange counsel,—and not counsel for me. I am daring, but not courageous. I can be bold when the peril is far away; but place me on the shore of life's stormy sea, show me the frail barque that is to carry me off,—and my heart sinks with fear within me. The time when I longed for independence is gone. What is it but another name for selfishness? I know nothing more miserable. Why should people be for ever anxious to have their own way, when it would be so much more easy to yield to some safer

hand, close one's eyes, and thus go down the stream?"

Rose looked up as her sister spoke thus; she seemed inclined to reply, but checked the temptation; they both worked on in a silence which was not broken until the entrance of Madame Lavigne. The blind woman was even more than usually cross; nothing could please her: Nathalie failed in restoring her to good humour, although she several times endeavoured to do so in the course of the day. She once rose to arrange her pillow, but scarcely had her hand touched it when Madame Lavigne turned round on her, exclaiming with a sort of snarl:

" Do not; you know I hate fondling."

She looked anything but an object to fondle; but Nathalie was in a pacific mood, and only gave her a look of gentle pity.

" Well, what are you standing there for?" snapishly asked Madame Lavigne, turning towards her with a frown; " have you got nothing to say?"

" Nothing, I am afraid, that would amuse you."

" Oh! what a gentle creature we are to-day! how softly we speak with that little low voice. ' Nothing, I am afraid, that would amuse you,' she added, mimicking her; " what if we talk about the best friend: will that rouse and vex you?"

" Why should it vex me, madame?"

" Oh! you know."

" Indeed, I do not."

“ It will not vex you, if I say he is harsh and bad.”

“ I shall conclude that you are mistaken: he is kind and good.”

“ He is a despot.”

“ Not in the least; he is just and good to all.”

“ And to you !” said Madame Lavigne, sneering.

“ He is very good to me,” seriously replied Nathalie.

“ Do not tell me that: I know those Sainvilles; they are flint and steel. I knew *him* when he was a youth, and people called him Monsieur Armand; he then looked sour and dark—I dare say he looks so still.”

“ Did you see him, then ?” asked Nathalie.

“ I sat at mass, near him and his pretty cousin, every Sunday for two years.”

“ What was she like—how did she look ?”

A sour and disagreeable expression gradually settled on the feaures of Madame Lavigne. Her head was sunk on her chest; she shook it slowly, and laughed to herself a low syllabic “ Ha-ha !”

“ Was she very handsome ?” reiterated Nathalie, drawing nearer to the blind woman’s chair.

Rose laid down her work, and eyed them both.

Madame Lavigne raised her head, and turned it towards the young girl, as if she still could see with her dull sightless orbs.

“ She was beautiful !” she said, emphatically, “ but

'not at all like you ; she was like an angel, and you are more like a wicked spirit, or a salamander."

"Was she not very pale?"

"Ay, as pale as a fresh-blown rose ; but with all that, she was the most delicate creature eye ever saw —a sylph, in short. But young, pretty, and delicate as she was, she died ; whilst old, ugly, and blind, Madame Lavigne has lived on."

"It is now very long ago?" resumed Nathalie.

"Some fifteen years. Oh ! she was a lovely creature!"

Strange power of a matchless beauty ! death had stepped in : years had elapsed, but time had not yet effaced the memory of that ideal loveliness which thus seemed to live and to endure beyond the grave. Nathalie asked no further questions : indeed, she spoke no more.

"Go," impatiently exclaimed the blind woman, waving the young girl away ; "you have become dull and moping this time back : there is not a bit of spirit left in you I suppose you are turning lackadaisical and sentimental."

Rose looked at her sister, but Nathalie's face was averted from her, and she could not trace its expression.

Towards twilight the young girl left. Rose accompanied her to the door. They were alone in the dark passage ; the elder sister looked at the other with a fixed and earnest glance.

“My poor child!” said she, in a low tone, “you are not well, that I can see. Come to me oftener.”

Nathalie did not reply; she twined her arms around the neck of Rose, kissed her, and was gone; but Rose felt that tears, not her own, had remained on her cheek.

In the well-lit hall of the château Nathalie met Amanda. The *femme-de-chambre* stepped forward, and said, with a subdued smile, and downcast look:

“Shall I have the pleasure of accompanying mademoiselle to her room?”

“And for what reason?” inquired Nathalie, much surprised.

“I thought that mademoiselle might like me to assist her in her toilet.”

Nathalie thought that Mademoiselle Amanda was very impertinent; but she merely replied that she did not intend changing her dress, and accordingly went up alone to her room. She lingered there long; to go down to the drawing-room, and meet Madame Marceau and her brother was disagreeable to her; she could not even endure the idea of visiting Aunt Radegonde, in her lonely *boudoir*; she wished to be alone—alone with her thoughts. A heaviness of spirit, a sense of coming evil, was over her; she reasoned, and endeavoured to chase it away, but it was importunate, and would return: there was no remedy for it, but to submit—to yield to the feeling, and let it have

sway. She did so, and the passing weakness relieved her. At nine she resolved on going down; she would greatly have preferred remaining in her room, but it would have looked singular. She paused near the drawing-room door; a regular and monotonous step paced the floor—it was Monsieur de Sainville; she thought he would have retired by this: but whether he was there or not, she must go in. She entered, closed the door behind her, advanced a few steps, then remained rooted to the spot on which she stood. Seated near his mother she had beheld the dark and handsome Charles Marceau.

That strange, heart-sickening dread, which is experienced in the great crises of existence, came over Nathalie. She felt like one who has long toiled up an arduous way, through some rocky steep, who stands on the crowning summit with at least a glimpse of the promised land in view; but whom an iron grasp suddenly snatches away, and pitilessly drags down again to the dark valleys, where the fair vision is shut out for ever by gloomy and rugged rock. “Oh!” she thought, with a passing feeling of despair, “the moment dreaded so long is come at last.” But she remained calm outwardly, for she saw that all were looking at her, from Madame Marceau, on her couch, to Monsieur de Sainville, now standing motionless, like her, in the centre of the room. Charles rose, and bowed; Nathalie inclined her head and came forward; Monsieur de Sainville resumed

his promenade ; his sister coldly greeted the young girl. No one spoke.

She sat down, and took her work-basket. She looked at Madame Marceau ; the lady averted her cold and severe face : at Monsieur de Sainville ; he walked up and down the room, and looked neither right nor left : at Charles Marceau ; he alone seemed perfectly composed, and he alone looked at her. She worked for about a quarter of an hour ; but she felt like one in a dream, for still she heard the monotonous pace on one side, and on the other met the fixed and watchful look, whenever she raised her glance. She abruptly laid down her task, and retired to her room.

She had foreseen it would come to this. Why should she remain for ever in that house ? And yet it now seemed very hard and bitter to go. "And must I go, indeed ?" she asked herself, with her brow leaning on her hand ; and conscience and pride gave but one reply : "Depart ! You have no right to stay here, to be the cause of useless strife ;—depart !" She struggled, and finally yielded. She would leave on the following morning, early, without seeing any one. But would not this look as if she had run away ? She would be missed ; servants would be questioned ; and it would all seem very strange. She at length resolved on writing to Monsieur de Sainville ; but when the note—a short one—lay sealed upon her desk, she asked herself how he would receive it. To

leave it in her room was useless—to give it to a servant was precisely what she most wished to avoid. In her perplexity, she almost thought of going down to the library and asking Monsieur de Sainville to grant her an interview; but the idea was quickly rejected for another which it had suggested.

Nathalie had not resided so long in the château without knowing the daily habits of its master. He was an early riser, and went down to the library every morning. The young girl intended being gone by that time; a letter placed there for him, lying on the table, in some conspicuous spot, would therefore meet his view at once, and long before her departure could have been discovered by any one else. She knew her host too well not to feel certain that he would immediately take such steps as would check indiscreet or disagreeable conjectures. This was, therefore, the course she resolved on adopting. She extinguished her light, and sat down near the window, waiting until a light should appear in the opposite turret. She waited long; but it came at length, and with it appeared Monsieur de Sainville's figure, seen through the muslin curtain. Nathalie did not wait for more. She took the letter, opened the door, paused, and listened. The house was perfectly still. She walked softly along the corridor—since her illness, Madame Marceau had removed to a lower apartment—and, when she had reached the head of the staircase, looked down over the bannister.

A faint circle of light glimmered at the bottom of its dark depths; she knew this must be the lamp in the hall, dying away; it was as she thought. The last servant had retired to rest,—no one would see or disturb her. Her step was light; her satin slippers made no sound, and fell noiselessly on each step of polished oak. She had gone down as far as the first floor landing, when she suddenly stopped short. Madame Marceau's door, which faced the drawing-room, stood ajar, and a faint streak of light glided out on the otherwise dark landing. Whilst Nathalie hesitated, and wondered whether she ought to proceed or to retrace her steps, she heard Madame Marceau's voice exclaiming:

“ Charles, do not blame me! What I saw made me desperate. Do not blame me! I meant well; and all for your good. Do not break my heart—do not!”

Her son made some low reply, which did not reach Nathalie's ear.

“ And I tell you,” passionately answered his mother, “ that though I should die, this shall not be! She—she—it shall not be—it shall not be!”

Her voice rose louder with every word. Nathalie heard the young man leave his seat, and close the door. The landing relapsed into sudden darkness and silence. The young girl paused for a moment, then softly glided down. She reached the hall, which was still partly lit by the faint, lurid light of the dying

lamp, without having awakened one echo in the now silent house. To add to her good fortune, she found the library door ajar; she entered, and closed it softly after her.

Notwithstanding his predeliction for cold climates Monsieur de Sainville did not seem averse to a good fire, for the remains of what had evidently been a bright one, still burned on the hearth. But it only shed a warm, soft light, that did not dispel the shadowy gloom of the apartment; there was no clear, vivid flame, to give distinctness to every object; Nathalie could merely see her way. She reached the table, placed her letter on a book, and rejoicing at her success, was turning towards the door, when she perceived Monsieur de Sainville standing near her. He had come by the private staircase, and entered unheard. She remained petrified. Even by that doubtful light she could detect the surprised expression of his countenance. This was a circumstance so perfectly unexpected by her, that Nathalie lost all her presence of mind, and stood motionless and mute. He quietly stooped on the hearth, applied a match to the embers, and in a second had lit one of the waxlights in the sconces on either side of the mirror over the mantel-piece.

“ You came to look at my books!” he said, with a smile. “ Well, you will find, as I said, poems, and even novels, amongst them.”

He spoke in a light, jesting tone, as if it were

perfectly natural for him to find her at this hour in an apartment which was his so exclusively ; but though he probably did so in order to dispel her embarrassment, Nathalie could see his keen, rapid look wandering restlessly from her to the table. She could also see, in the mirror before her, that she was very pale, and she felt herself trembling.

“ Sir,” she began, in a faltering tone, “ I feel how surprised——”

“ No, I was not much surprised,” he interrupted ; “ my first impression was that nothing but a ghost or spirit could move so softly ; it not being, however, the witching time of midnight, I concluded that Mademoiselle Amanda, who has rather a literary turn, had come here for an hour’s reading ; but she does not wear that simple brown dress, by which I perceived it must be you.”

Mademoiselle Amanda was, indeed, twice as smart as Nathalie, who had persisted in retaining the simple, quaker-like costume she wore at Mademoiselle Dantin’s ; her motive, it must be confessed, being far more akin to pride than to the lowly virtue of humility. Far from displeasing, the allusion of her host rather gratified her, or rather would have gratified her, if she could have thought of anything save her present awkward predicament.

“ Sir,” she resumed, a little more composedly, “ I know you must wonder——”

“ Wonder—no ! I wonder at nothing.”

“ Allow me, sir ; it must look strange,—but I did not come here at this hour without having a motive for doing so. There was a letter——” She looked at the table, covered with papers, and could not see her epistle.

“ You put it on that Encyclopedia,” said he, quietly. He stepped forward, took up the letter, glanced at the name written on the back, broke the seal, and read it deliberately.

“ So,” said he, looking up, with a steady glance, at Nathalie, “ you warn me that you are going ; thank me for my hospitality, many kindnesses, and so forth. Pray, may I ask you why you have resolved on this precipitate departure ?”

“ Because your nephew has returned, sir,” gravely replied Nathalie.

“ Be easy then ; unless I am much mistaken, he will leave to-morrow. He came without my permission, and shall depart through my order.”

He looked stern and forbidding.

“ You remain, of course ?” he added, after awhile.

“ No, sir,” she seriously answered, “ I have taken the resolve to leave Sainville.” She spoke with some emphasis.

“ Taken the resolve to leave Sainville !” he echoed, with a smile, as if he scarcely held this to be serious. “ My child, never ‘ take a resolve ;’ next to a vow it is the most foolish thing I know.” He spoke slowly, uttering word by word.

Nathalie looked at him with startling suddenness.

“ Foolish ! you think a vow foolish !” she exclaimed. Eager inquiry was in her fixed look and parted lips.

“ Foolish and absurd,” he deliberately answered ; “ but what interest do you feel in this ? Have you been taking a vow, that you look so startled ? Believe me : break your vow, on the principle that, as to take it was foolish, to keep it would be sinful.”

“ You do not think a vow binding ?” asked Nathalie, in a low tone.

“ Not unless when it happens to be a promise. Was yours a promise ?”

“ No ; at least I do not think so.” She spoke hesitatingly, but her face was radiant with joy.

“ Come,” he said, with a smile, and looking at her attentively ; “ I see I have been a good casuist, and removed your scruples ; and now tell me what cloud has been on you these two days, that you have remained either invisible or mute ?”

She coloured deeply, but did not reply.

“ I had a bad headache,” she answered at length.

He smiled rather sceptically, but merely said :

“ Is it gone ?”

His look and tone made her at once recover her composure, and she very coolly replied :

“ Oh ! dear no !”

He did not insist, but negligently taking up her letter, observed :

“Of course this is *non-avenu*; you remain? What! you look doubtful? Did I not tell you Charles was going away to-morrow?”

He spoke with stern brevity. Few persons would have cared to interfere in a matter on which Monsieur de Sainville had once pronounced; yet it was this Nathalie now ventured to do.

“Madame Marceau is very ill, sir,” she urged appealingly.

“She is, and therefore I did not order Charles to leave the house immediately.”

“Order!” she had not thought he could be so severe and imperious as this one word proved him. He looked at her attentively, then said with some abruptness:

“You understand the nature of a contract, do you not?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Well, then, a contract has been passed between Charles and me. For the sake of certain advantages I need not detail, he has of his own free will, agreed to obey me on all points save one; it was I who stipulated that on that point he should be his own master. Had he preferred total independence, he might have had it; nor would I have allowed my sister’s son to struggle unaided through the world, but he chose to place his neck under the yoke in order to ascend more rapidly. I warned him that I would have entire submission or none; he consented; yet,

has already violated the contract twice. It is now broken for ever."

All this was very clear and logical, and because it was so logical, Nathalie, who ever acted from impulse, thought it hard.

"Confess that you think me despotic?" said Monsieur de Sainville.

"No, sir," replied Nathalie, a little confused, "it is only justice."

"But a sort of justice you do not like?"

"Madame Marceau is very ill, sir."

"Do you imagine she wishes for his presence here? Do you imagine he consulted her feelings when he returned?"

"She may be angry with him, sir; but she cannot but be deeply grieved at your anger."

"He has broken the contract; it cannot be helped."

"Madame Marceau is very ill, sir."

"I am afraid she is."

"The shock may injure her."

He said nothing.

"Yes, indeed, it may injure her very much," she persisted.

"Do you mean to say, I ought to forgive Charles this second disobedience?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Then ask me."

He spoke in a low tone; his arms folded on his

breast ; his look was downcast, and did not once seek hers.

Nathalie thought her ear must have deceived her, and eyed him with a perplexed glance.

“ You will not ?” said he, turning towards her ; “ you are too proud to prefer a request ?”

“ No, sir, but——” she paused.

“ I see, I must explain myself,” he resumed ; “ Have you never read that legend of the perturbed spirit that must be questioned before it can speak ? Suppose that we take another version of the legend : that it is a spirit that must be asked a boon by some pure mortal before it can grant it ?”

“ But, sir,” said Nathalie seriously, “ there are no spirits in this case.”

“ How do you know ? What do you know about spirits and their ways ? Why should not men be possessed now by them, as in the time when the Gospel was preached ?”

“ Those were evil spirits, sir.”

“ Ay, and they have not yet left this earth ; they daily go forth amongst us and tenant many a human frame. Child, are not our evil passions spirits that need some pure influence to cast them forth ? Is not will, tyranny ; is not pride, the sin of Satan ?”

Still Nathalie hesitated. She did not understand why Monsieur de Sainville wished to be asked that which he now seemed willing to yield.

“Then, I suppose, sir,” she hesitatingly observed, “you would grant a request?”

“Why do you wish to know, and yet have not courage to brave the spirits whose existence you denied?”

“Monsieur de Sainville,” said Nathalie, somewhat piqued, “I ask you to forgive your nephew.”

“See what a little daring can do,” he replied with a smile; “the evil spirit retires subdued; the boon is granted. What would my proud sister say if she knew that the young girl, whom her son must not hope to marry with her consent, has saved that son from a grievous fall? And yet this is rather awkward,” he added after a pause; “for though she knows nothing yet, I have already told Charles it was all over between us. I must retract, I suppose. Well, we will not talk of this just now. I have a question to ask you.”

“Sir,” said Nathalie, uneasily glancing at the clock, “it is late; had I not better go?”

“Why so? I shall not detain you long; and you surely do not think there is any harm in talking here with me a few moments?”

He spoke very seriously, and she quite as seriously replied:

“No, sir.”

“I have only a brief question to put: You meant to leave Sainville; what were your intentions for the future?”

He slowly turned round as if to see her better whilst she delivered the expected reply. Nathalie felt somewhat embarrassed. She had looked on that momentous subject with all the delightful vagueness of years; the future to her was some undefined good in store; a broad realm of which she was sovereign lady; which she had but to enter, win and possess.

“I had no intentions for the future,” she at length replied, “but the world was before me; I am young; I could work, strive and if needs be, endure.” She spoke earnestly, and therefore was no little piqued to perceive her host looking down at her with a sceptical yet not unkind smile.

“Oh! wise daring of youth!” he returned; “you are eighteen; that is to say, just more than a child; and you talk of trying your fortunes, without doubt, without fear?”

“I have no fortunes to try; I simply meant to live.”

“And living in our pleasant, social state is in itself a singular share of good fortune. Have you any idea of the struggles a woman, especially, must go through, in order to earn her daily bread? And you, so proud, so heedless, so confiding, so frank,—you actually contemplated that destiny! And how you would have trusted and been deceived,” he added, eyeing her compassionately; “by women especially! You are credulous by nature;—do not look so indignant; I give you my word I have a sincere respect for a

certain sort of ignorance,—credulous, as I said, and trusting; consequently, easily imposed upon."

"Really, sir," said Nathalie, colouring, and looking almost offended, "all this is not very flattering."

"Is it not? Would you have preferred hearing me address you in this strain?—‘Mademoiselle Montolieu, I admire your resolve to enter at once into the great social strife. I feel confident so enterprising and prudent a young lady will emerge triumphantly from every difficulty. Your shrewdness and sagacity render it of course impossible that man should ever deceive or woman outwit you.’ Come, would you have preferred this?"

"No, sir; but surely there is such a thing as not being outwitted, nor yet outwitting?"

"The medium course; no;—believe me, that is rare—rare! it is impossible."

"Then I wonder how many people you have outwitted in your time?" promptly thought Nathalie.

"You may as well say it aloud," he observed, with a smile. "Well, I have outwitted a good many, no doubt; but do not draw wrong conclusions; I am no disciple of Machiavel. I give you my word," he emphatically added, "that I have never deceived, save where an attempt to deceive me had first been made; then, of course, it was self-defence—as legitimate as it was easy."

Nathalie gave him a curious and astonished look.

"I see," he continued, "that you are longing to

know how this easy art is managed ; I will tell you, because, even when you know it, it is an art you will never learn ; otherwise, I should not open my lips. This great art is, to let the individual who attempts to deceive me believe that he or she has succeeded—no more. You look disappointed—you think, is this all ? You had imagined subtle plans and deep counter-scheming. No, believe me, all that is shallow, tedious, and useless ; deceivers are always prepared for either counter-schemes or entire success ; they are, moreover, weak and vain, like other mortals ; they believe in the success of their wit, when they do not find it opposed by scheming ; the thing they are least prepared for is, that their plans should be detected, and yet not met by other plans. You see, there is nothing very heinous in my system—I deceive passively.”

“ Since it is so easy, sir, why should I not try ?”

“ Because you would fail. You cannot deceive, even passively.”

“ This is not deceiving—it is only not allowing oneself to be seen through.”

“ Precisely ; it is the art of being opaque.”

He did not add, “ and you are transparent ;” but she felt it was implied.

“ Then I shall always be imposed upon ?”

“ Very often, I fear.”

“ And it is foolish to be deceived easily ?”

“ Why so ? It is not by talent that people deceive,

nor by talent that they oppose deceit; this is not a question of mind, but of character. A fool may lay a scheme that shall impose on a genius, yet he is still a fool, and the genius is a genius. If I mention all this," he continued, after a pause, "it is to satisfy, not to serve you—you will be deceived as easily as if I had never spoken."

"Sir," said Nathalie, rather piqued at these repeated assertions, "I do not trust every one, as you seem to think."

"Do you not? I had imagined you were in a state of universal faith."

"Oh! dear, no!" quite coolly.

"In whom, then, do you trust? What! no reply? This looks serious. I shall begin by myself;—do you trust me?"

He spoke in that light tone beneath which he often conveyed some graver meaning; but the look he bent upon her was singularly keen and penetrating.

Nathalie looked grave, or, as it is so well expressed by the French word, *recueillie*.

"Yes, sir, I do," she slowly answered.

"But in a vague way,—no more?"

He still spoke inquiringly. She looked up.

"Entirely," was her reply.

There was a pause.

"I can see you mean it," he said at length; "there is faith in your look,—in your voice. Yet

see how imprudent you are ! Why on earth should you trust me ? How can you actually know that I deserve your confidence ? ”

“ And when one knows , ” she quickly said , “ where is the trust ? ”

She instantly repented the words , and coloured deeply ; but though she almost fancied that a faint tinge of colour rose to her host’s pale cheek , he neither looked round nor seemed to have heard her , as he stood there , leaning against the table , and facing the dark fireplace . But he had heard her , nevertheless , for he said , quietly :

“ You have given an excellent definition of ‘ trust ; ’ far too good , indeed , for one who meant to go forth , and brave the struggles of life . My poor child , dream no more of leaving Sainville . When you talk of that so calmly , I seem to see a child indeed — smiling on a plank , tossed by a raging sea . Believe me , it is good to be here ; it is good to be sheltered by the substantial walls and broad roof of my old château ; it is good to sit in quiet by the hearth of domestic peace , and thence listen to the din and strife of the storm without ; to have no other concern with those wild sounds , save that they lull you to a repose more sweet and deep ; to see and hear the waves breaking around you , and to feel that the dark tide will never even reach or wet your feet . Trust me , child ; I am an old pilot : the struggles of my existence began when you were yet sleeping peacefully in your cradle . You

have scarcely felt the first keen breezes, and you are daring and hopeful still. But I, who have weathered many a storm, and gained at last this safe refuge, I would keep you here, and save you from years of toil, destined, perchance, to end in dismal wreck. Remain, my child, remain!"

They stood not far asunder. He gently laid his hand upon her head, and looked down into her flushed and listening face with serious and affectionate tenderness.

She looked as agitated as he seemed calm. Her heart beat so fast, that she feared he must end by hearing its tumultuous throbings. Hope, and a joy almost delirious, were with her for a moment; for she said to herself that she had found that safer hand to which she longed to trust her barque that same morning. He was silent now; but she still seemed to hear his low, kind voice saying, "Remain, my child, remain!" She heard no other sounds; but he did. He heard the hurried footsteps overhead, the sudden opening of a door, the violent ringing of a bell; and removing his hand from Nathalie's head, he exclaimed :

"What has happened?"

The sounds came from his sister's room, which was exactly over the library; he knew it, looked disturbed, and went to the door; then suddenly came back, as Nathalie was going to follow him.

"Do not go," said he; "I have granted you a

request—grant me this. Remain here until I return. I have more to say. You do not refuse, do you?"

"No, sir." But she spoke hesitatingly.

"You look timid. Are you afraid to remain here alone, my child? I am only going to see what it is; I shall soon be back."

He led her to a chair, made her sit down, and assuring her, with a smile, that he should not be long away, left her.

CHAPTER IX.

SHE remained alone.

Scarcely had the door closed on Monsieur de Sainville, when she heard him briefly inquiring:

“ Charles, what is the matter ?”

“ My mother is ill, sir,” answered the young man’s voice in the hall.

“ What has made her so?”

There was no reply.

“ Charles, what has made your mother ill? She seemed no worse than usual when she went up to her room. Have you been talking to her?” he added, after a pause.

“ Yes, sir, I have.”

“ And what have you been saying to her?”

“ Only what you were kind enough to tell me,”
replied the young man with some bitterness.

Monsieur de Sainville did not answer, but Nathalie heard him ordering a servant to ride off for the doctor; then his step ascended the staircase,—ere long she heard it in the room above,—but in a few moments all was still. There was a long silence, unbroken save by a low, monotonous sound,—the sound of speech. Sometimes she thought it rose almost to altercation,—at other times it wholly ceased. At length she heard the step of Monsieur de Sainville again; she thought he was coming down, and, bending forward, listened eagerly:—no; he was merely pacing his sister’s room to and fro. She sank back on her seat with an impatient and disappointed sigh, and looked abstractedly around her. The fire was out, the solitary wax-light burned with a pale flickering ray lost in that wide room. The bust looked white, spectre-like, and yet living; for a moment the young girl almost imagined that the cynical, though strangely intellectual, head of Voltaire smiled down sarcastically at her from its cornice, whilst the serene and ideal face of Fénelon gazed on her with gentle reproach;—the one deriding,

the other mildly reproving the folly of her thoughts. A small volume lay open on the table before her,—she took it up ; it was the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, open at the sixth chapter of the first book ; she read the chapter through. Of what did it treat ? Of the vanity of inordinate affections ; of dying to the flesh ; of the perishable nature of all human feelings ; of the peace which dwells in a passionless heart. She laid it down impatiently. The book of human scepticism and that of religious faith—*La Rochefoucauld* and *Thomas à Kempis*—still told the same story.

He had said that he would soon return, but an hour elapsed and yet he came not ; at length the door opened,—he entered. He looked grave and moody ; a cloud passed over his brow as he saw Nathalie.

“ You remained ? ” he said, as if he had not expected to find her there.

“ Yes, sir ; you made me promise to stay.”

He neither looked at her nor spoke.

“ To hear something you had to say,” she continued.

He merely said “ Ah ! ” abstractedly, and began walking up and down the room. Nathalie eyed him with mute surprise.

“How is Madame Marceau, sir?” she asked, after a pause of wonder.

He evidently did not hear her; she had to repeat her question. He looked up at her and smiled somewhat bitterly.

“Very ill, indeed,” he at length replied; “very ill, indeed. Worse, I believe, than she herself imagines; else——” he broke off, and once more paced the room up and down.

Nathalie rose to leave; he perceived it, walked up to her, took her hand, and looking down at her with some emotion, said :

“You wish to go—I do not detain you—I have nothing to say—You came too late: The evil spirit I asked you to conjure and subdue has turned round, and, before taking flight, cast on me the spell of sudden silence. It might have been well for me had I been less harsh—had I not driven matters to a crisis; but it is too late to repent. I thought myself wise, prudent and clear-sighted, when I was blind and foolish; I thought I could control time, circumstance, and the will of those around me; and I have lived to be baffled. For myself I care not; but I grieve for you. I thought I could make your path smooth and pleasant: that I could spare you trouble and fainting of the

heart in your little journey, and now, I find that it is not so; that the course I thought to shape for you must be of your own choosing; that if you wish to reach that shore where happiness awaits you, you must walk to it as Peter walked over the stormy flood —through faith:—But alas! alone, and without the helping hand. God knows I forsake you not willingly; but every man is jealous of his honour, and never yet has there been a stain on mine. Just I will be, no matter at what cost. Good night;—but no; we cannot part thus. Tell me once again that you have faith in me. You hesitate: do you wish to retract?"

"I retract nothing."

"But you look bewildered;—well you may—the test is too severe."

"Severe as it will be, I care not."

He eyed her wistfully.

"Take care," he said; "every man has his weakness, which is to him as his vulnerable heel to Achilles; and mine is to be trusted in—blindly. That you cannot do."

"Why not?" she asked, looking up with flushed face and kindling glance; "why not?"

"What! even though that which I cannot and will

not deny, which will grieve and wound you, should be brought up and laid before you ? What even then ?”

There was a brief pause ; he eyed her keenly.

“ Yes,” she said, “ even then.”

“ Promise.”

“ I promise.”

A sudden change came over him ; a flush rose to his brow : his look lit, his lip trembled. He drew her towards him, and looked down into her burning face ; then stooped eagerly—to draw back, release her, and turn pale the next moment.

“ Good night,” said he, in a wholly altered tone ; “ it is late, I detain you not ; rest well, you will need it—good night.”

She left him, and went up to her room. The door stood half open ; but though she had closed it carefully on leaving, she now heeded not this : there seemed a veil upon her eyes, and a mist on her thoughts. She paced the narrow room up and down with feverish haste, and asked herself one ceaseless question :

“ What did he mean ? What did he mean when he told me to promise—when he drew me towards him, and looked down into my face so eagerly ? what did he mean then ?”

Her brow throbbed and burned ; her veins seemed running fire, and her head swam for a moment. The atmosphere of the room felt stifling ; she opened her window, leaned her burning brow against the iron bar of the little balcony, and offered it to the cool night air.

There is a calm and solemn beauty in the aspect of night, which soothes down the fevered and overwrought spirit to its own deep and holy repose ; the scenes we gaze on daily then borrow from the hour a shadowy and mysterious loveliness. To behold in gloom that which we have never seen but in the free and open light of day, is as to enter on a new and unknown world, where all looks strange, indistinct, and vast.

As Nathalie gazed on the scene below her, she felt in her something of that secret communion which never wholly ceases between nature and the human heart. The moon shone dimly with a vague and doubtful light, ever and anon obscured by dark and swiftly-passing clouds. It had been raining, as she could feel by the humid freshness of the air : a few drops still fell with the murmuring gusts of wind that swept along the garden avenues, and slowly died away in their distant recesses. The tall and shadowy

lime-trees of the avenue waved in dark masses against the gloomy sky ; sometimes the whole garden lay wrapped in silent obscurity, until the breeze rose, and with many vague murmurs, swept the clouds away, and the moon dimly shining, revealed the contrast of the dark *parterres*, with their white gravel-walks, and some pale and solitary statue faintly gleaming through the gloom of its niche.

The silence and freshness of the hour gradually calmed Nathalie ; her brow no longer throbbed and burned, and her pulse ceased to beat feverishly. The slight delirium which had agitated her vanished ; she abandoned herself to thought, in a mood now chastened and subdued, when a sound below arrested her attention. She eagerly bent over the balcony, and looked, but all she could see was, that two figures emerged through the glass door from the library. They paused awhile, in low converse, on the stone steps which led into the garden ; then one of the figures re-entered the apartment : the other remained standing for full five minutes in the same spot, without so much as changing its attitude. Nathalie thought she recognized Monsieur de Sainville ; but who was the other ?—some servant ; his nephew, perhaps ! What could they be doing there at that hour ?

Monsieur de Sainville—for she now knew that it was he—moved on, and entered one of the walks. For some time she could distinguish his receding figure: finally it vanished. It was a full half-hour before he re-appeared, coming at a slow pace along a walk exactly opposite her. The moon now shone bright and clear; the lights fell full on his face. Nathalie could see every feature as distinctly as by day; at first, his folded arms and downcast glance made her feel doubtful—she might well have been deceived: but when he suddenly paused, and looked up, she could not doubt—it was sadness, yes, deep sadness every grave feature betrayed. He paced the alley to and fro; she watched, with feverish interest, the moment of his return, but every time his countenance met her look, it wore the same mournful meaning. Why was he sad? Was the memory of old times with him? Did it haunt him still, when years, and the impassable barrier of the grave, both bade him to forget? One moment she felt saddened; but the next, a voice whispered in her heart: “You are young and beautiful: you know it; he knows it, too—why, then, need you care for the past?”

A low knock at the door disturbed her; she went

and found Amanda standing in the dark corridor, with a light in her hand.

“How fortunate that mademoiselle is not yet undressed,” she exclaimed; “Madame so much wishes to speak to mademoiselle.”

“To speak to me!” said Nathalie, much surprised. Amanda quietly assented.

Nathalie thoughtfully followed her down stairs. “How is Madame Marceau now?” she asked, as they reached the first floor-landing.

“Much better. Doctor Laurent has given her a composing draught.”

“Will mademoiselle wait here, whilst I go in?” whispered Amanda.

She handed the light she held to Nathalie, who entered the drawing-room; Amanda opened the door of Madame Marceau’s room. She did not close it, and the sound of voices within reached Nathalie’s ear.

“Charles,” said the feverish voice of Madame Marceau, “remember you have given me your word!”

“Be content,” he replied rather impatiently; “I will not breathe a word you would wish unsaid.”

He came out and entered the drawing-room as he spoke.

“ May I speake to you ?” he asked in his low musical tones, and approaching the spot where Nathalie stood.

She coldly assented. The short dialogue she had chanced to overhear, gave her little relish for a conversation which it seemed was to be subject to the proud lady’s restrictions.

“ Did my sudden return offend you ?” he asked.

“ Offend me, sir ? Why should it ?”

“ True ; what is it to you ?”

He looked at her ; the resigned expression of her countenance stung him more deeply than anger.

“ So !” he exclaimed, “ you are still pitiless ?—still inexorable ?”

She could not repress a haughty smile.

“ Inexorable, sir ! This implies resentment ;—I feel none. The harm you may once have done me, has long been repaired by other members of your family.”

“ I understand,—my uncle ;—and is it for his sake you are so good as not to hate me ?”

Their looks met ; there was little love on either side.

“ Sir,” calmly answered Nathalie, “ I must remove this mistake of yours once for all. I give you

my word that I have never hated you, that I do not hate you, and that were we both to live until the end of time, nothing should ever induce me to hate you."

Charles Marceau eyed her from head to foot, with a look and smile that lived for years in the memory of the young girl ; but he said in his bland voice,—

" Your goodness overpowers me ; but I shall try, nay, I shall seek opportunities, to deserve it,—believe me I shall."

Nathalie involuntarily shrank from him.

" I hope," she began, but her voice faltered—

" You hope," softly echoed Charles.

" I mean to say—"

" You mean to say," he kindly repeated—

" I mean to say, sir," she impetuously exclaimed, " that such affection as yours takes the shape of persecution."

" You amaze me !" he replied with imperturbable coolness. " Persecution ! How could I suspect anything of the kind, when you so very kindly assured me of your perfect indifference?"

The temper of the Sainville race, to use a favourite expression of Madame Marceau, was not a gentle temper, but no one could deny that it was self-possessed. That almost unruffled and aristocratic smooth-

ness of manner which, with every difference of character, nevertheless marked Monsieur de Sainville, his sister, and her son, had often struck Nathalie, and because it was precisely that which she herself wanted, it awed and subdued her vehement nature. What had she to fear from Charles Marceau's resentment? Nothing that she knew of; yet as she saw him standing there before her, and gazed at his pale handsome face, and felt his oblique look upon her, she trembled and turned pale. He looked at her, smiled, quietly said he could see she was in no mood to listen to him, and left the room. Almost immediately Amanda's head appeared through the half-open door, and she signed Nathalie to follow her.

She found Madame Marceau sitting, or rather reclining, in a deep arm-chair near her bed; a night-lamp burned with a dim and subdued light on a low table near her; the room looked indistinct, and well nigh dark. Nathalie approached the arm-chair; it was a high-backed sombre-looking thing, framed by that dark back ground, the sick lady's face looked ghastly pale, and her sunken eyes shone with unnatural fire. The young girl asked how she felt.

“ Much better, Petite; much better, Petite.”

She spoke fast and feverishly. Nathalie looked at

her ; she had not undressed ; her toilet was, as usual, elaborate and rich, the result of all skilful Amanda's art, but Nathalie felt no mortal hand could now efface the signet of death from that brow.

"Come and sit here by me," said the lady, "I disturbed you, but I could not help it ; I could not wait until morning,—come and sit here by me."

The young girl complied, and asked how she had chanced to be taken ill so suddenly.

"Never mind, Petite ; let us come to the point ; What have you decided ?"

As she spoke, she took her hand, and fastened on her face an eager and burning look.

"Decided ! madame ?"

"Yes ; what have you decided ?"

"Decided about what ?"

"About my son, of course."

"Your son !"

"Good heavens ! why do you repeat my words so ? Did you not see Charles this evening ? Do you not know he is come back—come back to remain ?"

"This hint was not needed," cried Nathalie, colouring deeply, and rising as she spoke.

"What do you mean ?" abruptly asked Madame Marceau. "I do not understand you. Do you mean

to say that Armand has never hinted this to you? That when he returned to the library, where you waited so long, he never told you?"

Nathalie quickly turned round. How did Madame Marceau know she had been in the library? that she had waited there for his return? Had he told her? Why so? What did it mean? She felt and looked bewildered.

"Told me what?" she asked, at length. The lady did not reply, but looked slightly embarrassed. "Told me what?" resumed Nathalie; "that as your son remains, I had best leave? Was it that?"

"Leave!" echoed the lady, smiling; "how could you imagine anything so ungracious? Fie! leave! no--remain."

"Remain! madame; remain!"

"Yes; remain."

"But how can that be?"

Madame Marceau gently made her resume her seat, laid her hand on Nathalie's shoulder, and smiled in her face.

"As my son's wife," she softly said.

She bent and pressed her hot, feverish lips, on the young girl's brow.

Nathalie felt and looked like one who has received a sudden unseen blow.

"For heaven's sake, Petite," observed Madame Marceau, taking out her vinaigrette, "let us not have a scene; my nerves are weak. Armand might have told you, and spared me this."

"He knows it! he knows it!" cried Nathalie, seizing the lady's arm, and fastening a burning look full in her face.

"Knows it! of course. Did not Charles ask his consent, and did he not give it most readily? Do not look incredulous, Petite; it is so--upon my word, it is so. It was this evening, whilst you were sitting below, waiting for him—he sat there, just where you are sitting now, by me—Charles put it to him, in plain speech: 'Uncle,' he said, 'do you give your consent?' 'I do.' 'Full and free?' 'Full and free.' 'I can ask Mademoiselle Montolieu to marry me?' 'You can.' 'And if she consents, you raise no objection?' 'None; why should I?' 'Even if she agrees to a speedy union, you still consent?' 'I still consent.' 'You will not urge youth, want of fortune, or prudential considerations?' 'I shall urge nothing. I am rich; neither you nor your wife need feel anxious about the future; I give to this marriage

the freest, fullest consent, man can give.' Upon my word, Petite, you look as if you did not believe me; but go down to the library—I can hear him there still—go down, ask him, and see if he denies one word of it—see if he does."

Nathalie did not reply; but she dropped the lady's arm, and sank back on her seat, mute and pale. Madame Marceau resignedly applied her vinaigrette.

"I know," she said, in a melancholy tone, "those things never go off without some emotion; but pray be collected, my dear child. Here comes Charles."

Nathalie looked up slowly. The young man stood before her, in a grave, attentive attitude. She looked from him to the pale countenance and sunken eyes of his mother; both faces had but one meaning; they were waiting; still Nathalie did not speak.

"May I know Mademoiselle Montolieu's reply?" at length asked the young man.

She said nothing. She seemed to be struggling against some inward thought; to seek to comprehend some perplexing and baffling mystery. Madame Marceau quietly took her hand, and signing her son to approach, placed that passive hand in his; but scarcely had his hot and eager fingers closed on it, than Nathalie withdrew it, roused at once.

“ This cannot be,” she said in a low tone.

“ Come, do not be childish, Petite. I consent; my brother Armand, Monsieur de Sainville, consents; he consents, I tell you, he consents.”

“ And approves,” softly added Charles.

“ And approves,” eagerly echoed his mother.

“ Warmly approves the object of my choice,” continued the young man, with an impudent self-congratulation, which even at that moment stung Nathalie.

“ Of course,” gaily replied Madame Marceau; “ do you remember what he said when he came home after so many years? Charles, marry whom you like, but for heaven’s sake give me a pretty niece.”

“ Yes, I remember,” slowly replied her son, looking at Nathalie as he spoke.

“ And where could even he, so hard, so difficult to please, find a more charming niece?” said Madame Marceau, in a caressing tone.

Every hue from the deepest crimson to the palest white passed over Nathalie’s cheek, as Madame Marceau spoke thus, in a slow measured tone, that let word by word fall on the ear. She rose, and said briefly. “ Let those who like, give their consent: I withhold mine.”

Madame Marceau was going to speak ; her son checked her with a look.

“ Mademoiselle Montolieu has decided too hastily,” he said, in a peculiar tone ; “ she must be allowed time to reflect.”

He left the room. There was a long silence. Nathalie had not moved ; she stood in the same spot, her look fastened on the floor, her hands clasped together. Madame Marceau eyed her very attentively.

“ Petite,” she at length said in her kindest tones, “ come and sit here by me ; let us understand each other.”

“ Madame,” replied Nathalie, without looking up, “ there is nothing to understand. What I have said is said ; explanations are useless.”

“ Then you refuse to come and sit here.”

She did not answer, but looked troubled.

“ Will you, or will you not ?” asked the lady. “ I shall know how to interpret the refusal.”

Nathalie complied silently, she resumed her seat ; her look was averted from that of Madame Marceau. But the lady raised herself up, entwining one arm around the young girl’s neck, and placing the other hand on her shoulder, compelled her to look round, so that their eyes met.

“So,” said she, patting her playfully on the neck, —“so, Petite, for we two are going to have a friendly chat.”

Nathalie instinctively endeavoured to draw back, but the arm which held her, held her firmly.

“No, Petite,” continued Madame Marceau, shaking her head with a smile, “not yet! Why our friendly *causerie* is not yet begun! So you will not have my poor boy; you must have some reason.”

“No, madame, none,” was the quick reply.

“No reason! Look at what I have already gained!”

“I mean no particular reason.”

“Therefore a general one?” No reply. “The general reason is, after all, I suspect a particular one; you will not tell, but I am resolved to know. I must guess.”

Nathalie endeavoured to rise, to disengage herself from Madame Marceau, but the sick lady’s grasp, though light, was firm as steel. She held Nathalie literally fastened to her chair.

“You foolish child,” said she with a soft low laugh; “your *confidante* I must and will be. Only tell me if I guess well. Your reason is——” she paused and smiled as Nathalie’s colour faded away before her look—“pride,” she added quietly, whilst the young girl breathed freely.

“ You see,” calmly resumed Madame Marceau, “ You might as well have confided in me at once. I am not blind. Women may deceive men, but never one another. No woman can keep a secret from another woman. There is a freemasonry between us all, is there not, Petite?”

“ I suppose so, madame,” was the faint reply.

“ I am sure of it. Besides, is not observation the mother of discovery? Then know, that having observed much since my return from Paris, I have discovered a great deal. Amongst other things, that you are too proud to enter a family in which you imagine you are received only in compliance with the wishes of an impassioned young man. Now, Petite, I might prove to you that this is a mistake, that we desired, and long ago approved unconditionally, what has been mentioned to-day; but as you object to explanation, and as I have ascertained your ‘ reason;’ why let the matter rest.”

She released her as she spoke; but Nathalie, though free, did not move now.

“ Who desired, who approved long ago?” she asked with a fixed look.

“ We did, Petite.”

“ Madame, whom do you mean by we?”

“ The uncle and mother of Charles of course.”

“ You said, ‘ this evening,’ awhile back ; you said ‘ this evening ’ !”

“ Yes, it was this evening, Charles asked his uncle’s consent. But *we* had spoken of this often before.”

Nathalie rose and paced the room up and down ; then suddenly coming back to the lady’s chair, she feverishly asked :

“ Was it this he meant, when he asked me the other day, to like Sainville ?”

“ I dare say it was,” composedly replied Madame Marceau.

“ Was it this he meant, when he said this evening : remain, my child, remain ?”

“ I dare say it was.”

“ But why not speak more clearly ?”

Madame Marceau smiled.

“ Armand was always mysterious. It is one of his weaknesses to think no one can read him. But in all this he has not acted like a wary man of business ; he has trifled and delayed ; and I, ignorant woman as I am, know this is not wise. The truth is, often as we have talked the matter over and settled everything——”

“ Settled everything ; settled !” interrupted Nathalie,

in a broken tone ; “ I have been strangely used ! Am I not flesh and blood ? Have I no feeling, no heart, that I am thus disposed of ? ”

She was very pale, and trembled from head to foot ; her eyes flashed indignantly, her blanched lips quivered.

“ Does it make you indignant, that I should seek in you a daughter, and my brother a niece ? ”

“ A niece ! You may tell your brother, madame, that I decline the honour ; or rather I shall tell him so myself.”

“ Oh ! you will ! ” cried Madame Marceau with a withering look ; “ you need not, Petite. He knows it ; he let me see he knew you would refuse ; he let me see he knew your motives too.”

“ What if he did ? ” said Nathalie, turning round ; “ what if he did : it is for you and your son to care—not for me ! ”

“ What do you mean by saying it is for me and my son to care ? ” asked Madame Marceau, turning very pale, and speaking very low.

“ What I say.”

“ You confess it ! you dare to confess it ! ” cried she rising and crimsoning with sudden passion, “ and you taunt me with it too ! Shameless girl ! ” She trembled

with resentment. "Well, why not go on?" she added, in a quick broken tone. "Tell me all—I can bear it—I understand the wisdom of waiting now—before or after the funeral—Eh!"

Nathalie stepped back ; she thought her delirious. But Madame Marceau followed her and grasped her arm firmly.

"How dare you," she exclaimed again, "how dare you confess such a thing? Other women shrink and blush—and you go!"

She dropped her arm as a thing she had held too long. Nathalie turned white and red alternately, and looked as if she would sink into the earth ; but making an effort, she said : "What do you mean? I told your brother six months ago, that I never could love your son--no more! What did he say to you? What do you mean?"

Madame Marceau eyed her fixedly ; as she looked, a change came over her features. She turned away, and walked up and down the room with a steady step—a thing she had not done for weeks—but fever made her strong. She gave the young girl one or two quick guarded glances, but she did not reply. Nathalie walked up to her.

"What did he say,—what do you mean?" she asked.

“ Nothing—I have been hasty—cruel ; but I was excited ; I am excitable to-night. He told me—let me see—Yes, that you could not like Charles—that was it—no more ; do not imagine he said more. There, be content—it is late ; good night.”

She turned away ; but Nathalie followed her and caught hold of her garment.

“ Madame, what do you mean ?”

“ Mean !—nothing !”

“ What did he say ?”

Madame Marceau looked very grave.

“ My brother,” she said, “ is a grave man, little accustomed to women or young girls. I have noticed how embarrassed he often felt in the proper regulation of his behaviour towards you ; but, touchy as you are, you have no reason to complain of the host, of the man of the world,—above all, of the man of honour.”

“ I do not complain ; I ask a question.”

“ And look dreadfully suspicious too ! Do you imagine we had no other subjects of conversation than you or your motives for refusing Charles ? Do not imagine he said anything particular ? I tell you he is a man of honour.”

“ And why do you tell me that ?”

“ Because you might imagine——”

“ Imagine what?”

“ Nothing—I feel very fatigued. Good night.”

She kissed her; but Nathalie did not move.

“ Imagine what?” she repeated.

“ You foolish child! I tell you he told me nothing.”

“ Told you nothing—what had he to tell !”

“ Be satisfied, I tell you; he is a man of strict honour.”

“ Who doubts it? I do not; I will not doubt it,” passionately cried Nathalie.

“ I hope not, Mademoiselle Montolieu,” very seriously replied Madame Marceau, resuming her seat as she spoke. “ It is going on to two. Does it not strike you it is time this should cease? Good night. My nerves have been tried long enough. I must say I think it was unkind of Armand to leave this to me, in order to spare his own feelings. Very unkind. But the truth is, he did not know, I believe, how to break the tidings to you, and he certainly has a great horror of scenes, and woman’s tears.”

“ Madame,” said Nathalie, pressing her hand to her brow, as if to compel thought to remain calm,

“ it is clear he has spoken more freely than you confess. What is it ?”

“ You urge me to a breach of confidence.”

“ I ask to know what I have a right to know.”

“ A right—then I will not utter a word.”

“ If you will not tell me, he shall.”

She made a step forward.

“ Stay !” cried Madame Marceau, with sudden alarm. “ Stay ! are you mad ? Will nothing cool your hot southern blood ?”

“ Speak,” cried Nathalie, turning round upon her ; “ speak, and do not torture me any longer.”

“ Torture you ! You certainly use strange and picturesque expressions ? Am I an inquisitor ? Is it not to spare your feelings that I do not speak ; that I do not wish you to see Armand ? It is a delicate thing for him, for any man, to read the feelings of a young girl, and tell her with his own lips what he has read. I know I have said too much, but if you will promise to be calm and patient——”

“ I will, I will,” replied Nathalie, in a subdued tone ; “ I will ; but speak, for heaven’s sake speak.” She resumed her seat, and spoke as if to wait even one second were utterly intolerable.

Madame Marceau eyed her compassionately, and said with evident hesitation :

“ Poor little thing ! Nothing so peculiar was said. There were only vague hints about the odd fancies of young girls,—fancies on which it was good to close one’s eyes,—nay, even to indulge.”

“ He said this !” ejaculated Nathalie, pressing her hand to her brow.

“ Hinted, Petite ! hinted. Indeed he spoke most kindly, most compassionately. ‘ Time,’ he asserted, ‘ must be left to do its own work.’ I saw he was pained, for your sake, at any little weaknesses he might have detected.”

“ Weaknesses,—my weaknesses !” exclaimed Nathalie. “ It is false ! I have not been forward, or unwomanly ? It is false.”

“ Petite, you are growing very unreasonable. He said, emphatically, that your weaknesses were essentially womanly.”

Nathalie did not heed her. She had risen from her seat, and was agitatedly pacing the room up and down, pressing both her hands to her bosom, as if to stay its tumultuous throbings. Her brow was contracted, her look fixed, her breath came fast through her pale and parted lips.

“ God help me !” she exclaimed, in a low tone ;
“ God help me !”

“ Petite, you are getting excited. Must I tell you again, that Armand is the soul of delicacy and honour.”

“ Honour !” echoed Nathalie ; “ God save me from man, and the false thing called man’s honour.”

She stopped short in the centre of the room, with upraised look and clasped hands ; whilst tears—not of those which relieve, but of those which are wrung from the heart’s bitterest agony—slowly rolled down her cheeks.

Madame Marceau watched her with sufficient calmness ; yet she looked faint and pale, and repeatedly used her vinaigrette.

“ Petite,” she said, “ do not afflict yourself; I see Armand was greatly mistaken. But you can prove it to him ; not by saying so,—delicacy forbids it,—but by quietly agreeing to marry Charles. Shall I call him ?—Yes.”

She raised her voice ; the door opened ; her son entered, and came up to Nathalie. She did not allow either to speak, but said, quickly :

“ Charles, the poor child is still much agitated ; but you may trust to me. It is all right. Petite,

calm yourself. It is a trying moment; but such things must be. With all your heedlessness, you have much penetration and good sense. Apply both to the present case. You need it. Ah! Petite, when you have my experience, my knowledge of life; when you have reflected on human nature, and looked, considered, and compared——”

Charles frowned, and gave his mother a keen look; Nathalie, awakening as from a dream, eyed Madame Marceau with a perplexed air, as she continued, with unmoved composure and undiminished fluency of speech:

“ Yes, when you have reflected on human nature, looked, considered, and compared, you must come to the same painful conclusions at which I have, alas! arrived. But do not fear; my affection, my experience, shall watch over you;—and now it is really late. Good night, Petite; good night.”

Nathalie did not answer. Madame Marceau’s speech had given the fever of heart and brain time to cool. Diverted for a moment, thought had returned, but not alone; for with it came doubt, suspicion, and tardy penitence. All the time Madame Marceau spoke, she had eyed her keenly, but without seeking to fathom the meaning of her discourse. She was

reading the lines of her brow, the restless look of her eyes, the unsteady motion of her lips ; and it seemed as if a voice rose in her soul, and cried out, “She is false ! she is false !”

“ Good night, Petite,” repeated Madame Marceau.

“ Stay,” said her son, “ can I know——”

“ You shall not torment her,” hastily interrupted his mother.

“ I am grieved——” began Nathalie.

“ There ! you have grieved her !” indignantly said the lady.

“ Madame, I do not complain,” resumed Nathalie.

“ You are an angel ! But I am not going to see your feelings tried and wounded. Good night !”

“ Do you, or do you not consent ?” asked Charles, impatiently addressing the young girl.

His mother vainly strove to interfere.

“ No, sir,” had fallen from Nathalie’s lips.

“ No !” echoed Charles ; and an angry light passed over his dark features.

“ Quite right,” said his mother ; “ I admire your strong sense of feminine dignity, Petite. I had told you, sir, it was all right.”

“ Madame,” interrupted Nathalie, with much

decision, “I beg to state I have never given anything like consent.”

“You have not!”

“No, madam; I have not.”

“Petite,” said the lady, with a bitter smile; “I see Armand was right; that I was mistaken; that the freemasonry of women is nonsense after all.”

The sting went home, but pierced deeper than Madame Marceau thought.

“You mistake, madame,” replied Nathalie, in a low tone; “one woman cannot deceive another woman.”

“Explain yourself!” said Madame Marceau, with imperative calmness,—the calmness of suppressed passion.

Nathalie did not reply.

“Mademoiselle Montolieu,” resumed the lady, laying some stress on the plebeian name, “you are not sufficiently versed in the science of good breeding to know that there is a polite way of expressing doubt. I believe you mentioned something about your intention to leave;—there was something of the kind.”

She spoke as of occurrences the most remote; applied her vinaigrette, and wrapped her shawl around her. It was as if she had brought the young girl

from Mademoiselle Dantin's only the preceding evening, so completely had her old manner returned.

“Madame,” quietly said Nathalie, “do not think I shall leave this house without seeing and speaking to Monsieur de Sainville.”

The lady's composure vanished at once.

“Do you mean to breed strife between my brother and me?” she sharply asked.

“And what has he to do with this?” no less sharply asked her son. “Let him—let any man—dare to stand between me and the woman I love!”

Madame Marceau glanced from her son to Nathalie. She breathed hard, and clasped her hands firmly together. There was something like despair in the forced calmness of her look.

“Charles,” she said, in a low tone, “are you mad or blind? Leave us; I must reason with this foolish girl,—leave us!”

“I have long enough been kept in the dark,” he replied, without moving; “I will know more. Why did you write to me to come without delay,—to lose no time?”

“Heaven help me!” cried Madame Marceau, with a passion that brought a flush to her very brow; “heaven help me; between you both! . . . And here

he is!" she added, as a step was heard on the stairs.
"Do your worst."

Monsieur de Sainville entered. He gave a keen, rapid glance around him, then came forward, and paused before the chair of his sister.

"Rosalie," said he, severely, "you had given me your word that you would not excite yourself to-night; you had given me your word that Mademoiselle Montolieu would not be disturbed to-night."

"And I broke it!" replied his sister, with a look of defiance. "How kind, Armand, to remind me of that! Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, turning towards her, "you will not leave without an explanation,—you who are so mortally offended with my brother for noticing your little peculiarities of feeling—"

"What is the meaning of this?" sternly asked Monsieur de Sainvile, glancing from his sister to Nathalie, who changed colour; "Mademoiselle Montolieu mortally offended with me! Why so? For noting her peculiarities of feeling, too! What peculiarities?"

"Peculiarities, indeed!" bitterly echoed Madame Marceau; "peculiarities which I have long noticed

—peculiarities ill becoming the maiden selected to become my daughter, and your niece.”

“The selection was none of mine,” dryly replied Monsieur de Sainville, without seeming to notice the sudden paleness and burning blush which, as his sister spoke, had succeeded each other on the young girl’s cheek.

“You gave your consent; deny it if you can—you gave your consent, Armand.”

“I had no earthly right to withhold it; Charles was his own master.”

“But you did not object—no, not one objection did you raise: you know you did not. Far from it; you approved—you found nothing to object to in Mademoiselle Montolieu for your niece.”

She spoke triumphantly; he did not reply at once.

There was a pause. Charles, Nathalie, Madame Marceau—all three looked at Monsieur de Sainville, and those three looks had but one expression—ardent curiosity and expectation. He only looked at his sister, with severe compassion in every feature.

“Rosalie,” said he, “you place me in a singularly difficult position; yet such is my faith in Mademoiselle Montolieu’s candour and good sense, that I do not

hesitate to declare that, had I been called upon to select a wife for Charles, which I have not, and have never been, she is the very last person I should have chosen for him."

There was another pause, or rather a dead silence, Charles Marceau stepped one pace forward to look at his uncle ; ill-suppressed resentment lit up every dark feature. His mother was mortally pale ; she applied her vinaigrette, and looked as if she needed its use.

"Are you offended ?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, addressing Nathalie, who, with her face averted from him, and buried in her hands, now sat on a chair weeping silently.

She slowly turned round, on hearing his kind and low voice ; raised her face, but not her eyes, and answered, almost inaudibly, "No, sir." And every feature looked transformed ; and it was as if the halo of some radiant happiness had fallen around her.

"Why not also favour us with your motives, Armand ?" asked his sister, with a burning glance.

"If Mademoiselle Montolieu desires it," said he, very coolly, "I shall, indeed, be quite ready to do so."

"No, no," she quickly replied, whilst a crimson

hue passed over her features ; “ I am convinced, sir, you meant nothing offensive : that is enough.”

“ Yes,” bitterly said Madame Marceau, “ that is enough ; for I see I have led to a most agreeable explanation : but it is not over yet—no, it is not over yet.”

“ Rosalie,” observed her brother with something like kindness, “ let us drop the subject.”

His sister did not reply ; the hand which held the vinaigrette shook violently, but her eye was unquailing and unconquered ; resolve, will, and defiance were in her mien.

“ I will not let it drop,” said she, in a broken and husky tone : “ I will not. We shall see if you and she are ever to be in the right ; if I am to be to my face accused of falsehood and treachery ; I will have an explanation—a clear explanation.”

“ Madame,” interposed Nathalie, in a low tone, “ I grant, that I misunderstood you.”

“ Then perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what extraordinary construction you put on my words ! I ask to be instructed—I want to know, Mademoiselle Montolieu ; will you, then, I say, be good enough to tell me what construction you put upon my words ?”

“I repeat, madame, that I misunderstood you—what more can I say?”

“And is it my fault if you misunderstood me?” feverishly exclaimed the sick lady; “did I not, over and over again, beseech you to be calm? Did I not repeatedly tell you, you were quite wrong; that you, that any woman—that any one might trust to my brother’s sense of honour?”

Monsieur de Sainville looked up.

“And what can have been said affecting my honour?” he imperatively asked.

“No matter what, Armand; enough to make her doubt it,” replied his sister, who had arrived at such a state of exasperation, that she cared not how deep she fell, provided she dragged down Nathalie with her.

“She never doubted it,” briefly said Monsieur de Sainville, steadily eyeing Nathalie as he spoke. The young girl shrank from his glance. “She never doubted it,” he repeated,

“No, of course not,” cried his sister, feeling that her vengeance had come, “no, of course not, Armand; whilst I kept remonstrating with her, urging her to reflection, to confidence in your honour, she did not exclaim, ‘God save me from the false thing

called man's honour !' Oh, no, it is I misunderstood, I who invented it of course."

Monsieur de Sainville did not heed her; he was looking at Nathalie, who had sunk back on her seat speechless, and—though she bit her lip until the blood came—deadly pale. Monsieur de Sainville rose and paced the room, not agitatedly; he had never seemed more sedate, but yet as if striving against some inward emotion, probably wrath, for his eyes had an angry gleam, and his lips slight nervous twitchings. He at length came and paused before Nathalie; she trembled visibly. Madame Marceau eyed her with a fiery look, Charles with a lowering glance.

" Mademoiselle Montolieu did you utter those words ?"

She did not answer.

" Mademoiselle Montolieu," he repeated in a deeper and more thrilling accent, " did you or did you not utter those words ?"

There was something almost beseeching in his tone; something that pierced her heart with the most exquisite sorrow. She felt like the faithless disciple after he had denied his Divine Master, and, like him, turning her head away, she wept bitterly.

What reply could have been more eloquent than this

silence. He stood there a while longer, eyeing her with a stern smile, then silently turned away.

“ There was a promise which you made a few hours ago,” he resumed after a pause.

“ Yes, sir,” she replied in a low tone.

“ I release you from it,” he calmly said.

Nathalie looked up; her very brow had coloured; her lips trembled with indignant resentment; but the marble mantelpiece against which he now leaned, was not more cold and unmoved than Monsieur de Sainville.

“ Oh, *mon Dieu!* how sorry, how very sorry, I am,” soothingly exclaimed Madame Marceau; “ is it possible that I should have done so much mischief. My dear Armand, let me remonstrate with you. If Mademoiselle Montolieu has been too hasty, yet pray remember that she is still my future daughter, your future niece.”

“ What! she has consented!” he exclaimed with an involuntary start.

His look was suddenly rivetted on Nathalie. She did not shrink from it; far from it; she met his eye steadily; but the glance that sought hers was one that repelled scrutiny; her look was deep, brief, and searching, but she felt, and felt truly, that it was baffled.

Nathalie turned away with a troubled look ; she was evidently much agitated, and abstractedly pressed her hands together ; but suddenly her emotion subsided, and her glance was steady, her voice was firm, as she addressed Madame Marceau.

“ Madame,” she said with something like dignity, “ I appreciate the generosity of feeling which, in spite of all that has passed, induces you to consider the relation you contemplated between us as unbroken.”

“ Then after all you consent,” exclaimed the lady, looking more astonished than pleased at the effect her generosity had produced.

“ I ask for time to reflect,” said Nathalie in a low tone.

“ You have had time enough,” imperatively said the lady.

But without heeding her speech, her son came forward ; he had remained apart silent, his eyes downcast, his arms folded, apparently unmoved, yet losing nothing of all that passed from the lowest word to the most trifling gesture : pausing before Nathalie, he said in his low voice,—

“ I grant it.”

The tone was courteous, but when Nathalie looked

up and met his eye, when she also met the look of Monsieur de Sainville, she felt that whatever her final answer might be, she had given the young man a claim over her, and taken one of those steps that are not retraced in the journey of life.

Nor did Charles Marceau seem unaware of the ground he had won back. His tone, as we have said, was courteous, his attitude deferential, yet through both pierced the secret consciousness that the haughty beauty, who had rejected him twice within a few hours, had now stepped down from her pedestal to be wooed, won, and perchance slighted in her turn, like any other mortal maiden.

CHAPTER X.

THERE is something beautiful and touching in the custom, prevalent in Catholic countries, of leaving the churches open from morning until a late evening hour; so that all may enter them freely for devotion and prayer.

No doubt, prayer, as an attribute of the spirit, may be exercised everywhere. There is no need of holy shrines or consecrated walls to usher man into the divine presence; and the glorious and magnificent works of God call the soul far more eloquently to religious worship than all the pomp and pride with which man ever arrayed the perishable fabric of his temples. Yet the link which binds us to the house of prayer is both deep and holy: it is felt in the sunny village church, as well as in the solemn

cathedral, with legendary fanes faintly gleaming through gathering gloom. The spot where human beings have knelt in worship, where they have poured forth their souls in prayer, and yearned towards a purer existence, is sanctified to man for evermore. We cannot behold unmoved the place which has witnessed so much human joy, and, perchance, also, so much human sorrow; the sanctuary which remained ever open to the weary pilgrims of humanity,—a silent and isolated refuge amidst the strife and turmoil of life.

A few days after the incidents recorded in the last chapter, Rose Montolieu left the house of her aunt at twilight, and turning round the angle of the narrow court, entered the old abbey, through a low side-door, which yielded to her touch, swung noiselessly on its hinges, and silently closed behind her. The interior aspect of the church was simple, and even severe. The walls were bare, and the whole of the edifice was imperfectly lit; tall pillars sprang up to the arched roof, and vanished in its deepening obscurity; the distant altar was dimly visible at the end of the long nave, where only a few poor women now knelt in prayer, for this was not the hour of any religious service.

Rose took her usual place, in the sheltering

obscurity of a massive pillar; there she sat, her forehead buried in her hands, not praying in actual language, but yielding up her soul to communion with God. This was the only mystic and imaginative feature of her piety, or, indeed, of her character; both of which were essentially practical and severe. Nathalie loved her sister, and respected her deeply; yet she could not conceal from herself that Rose was not winning, amiable, or gentle. The sight of her goodness strengthened the soul, because it was from a heroic soul that it sprang; it left the heart unmoved, because, to say the truth, in that goodness the heart had no part. But what surprised Nathalie still more was that her sister, with her fervent faith and deep piety, was yet painfully sceptical on other subjects. In vain did she seek to hide how deeply she doubted of all that the human heart most desires to be true,—of virtue, devotedness, love, and friendship, and, above all, of earthly happiness,—her doubt could not be concealed; its shadow always fell like a sudden and death-like chill on the light and life of her young sister's heart.

Faith in heaven does not necessarily imply scepticism in human nature, or in things of earth. We may believe in the divine, and not deny humanity; we may, but some minds—and Rose was of these—

cannot. Their religion springs from the longing love of the ideal, from the weariness of earth, from the deep and still unsatisfied aspiration towards excellence. This piety, though fervent, true, and zealous, is little liked or approved. The world naturally prefers cheerful piety,—that gentle offspring of hearts, happy by nature, or whom sorrow only chastens: who, indeed, would not love it? But can all feel it equally? Are there not too many to whom religion is essentially a refuge, who cling to it as shipwrecked mariners cling to a last plank of safety, who obey its behests, and fulfil its duties faithfully; but who fail in the charm that renders either the faith or the disciple attractive,—who love little, and are still less loved? Can these be gay, happy, and free givers of the charities of life? Yet how harsh, how severe, is the world to them! It upbraids them with not being that which they could not possibly be; it calls their faith cheerless, gloomy, and desponding; and it never asks itself how, unless through a miracle, sweet waters could flow from the source of an embittered heart!

Yes, it is true, their faith is indeed more akin to despair than to hope; and this is why they must believe; not to believe would be for them to perish irretrievably. Through their own folly, misfortune, or

too clear-sightedness, they have lost earth: be merciful —envy them not heaven.

Rose remained about an hour thus; she then left her seat, turned down one of the aisles, and passed by a retired chapel with a solitary lamp burning before its silent shrine. It was the chapel of the Virgin, whose pale sculptural image rose over the altar. Pure and humble, with downcast eyes, and hands meekly folded on her bosom, she seemed to have just heard the salutation of the angel, and to be still replying: “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.” White vases filled with such white flowers as the season afforded, were the only ornaments of the altar; shrubs, with blossoms of the same chaste and virgin hue, were placed in a semicircle at its base; a low iron railing inclosed the shrine. Near that railing now knelt a woman, whose bowed head, clasped hand, and motionless attitude seemed to betoken earnest prayer.

The lamp which burned before the shrine was, according to the general custom, suspended by a long iron chain from the lofty roof: its light fell almost entirely within the inclosed area, and only one tremulous ray descended to the spot occupied by the stranger. Yet there was something in her figure, though shrouded by sombre outward garments, that

seemed familiar to the eye of Rose, who involuntarily lingered near the spot. After awhile the stranger lifted up her head and leaned back, though still kneeling, with her look fixed on the altar; her veil was thrown back, and her countenance appeared fully revealed.

It was, as Rose had suspected, Nathalie; ay, Nathalie, but such as she had never yet seen her; sad, wan, and broken down by grief, with a troubled look and eyes dimmed by weeping. She was deadly pale, and the tears which still glistened on her cheek told, not less than her despairing and helpless attitude, of the vain struggle between the soul's prayer and the heart's passionate sorrow.

Rose eyed her sister with deep sadness, then stepped forward and lightly placed her hand on Nathalie's shoulder. The young girl started, rose precipitately and drew her veil down; but she made no resistance when her sister took her arm within her own and led her away. They left the church by the front entrance, and neither spoke until they emerged from its shadowy gloom into the moonlit space beyond. Rose paused on the first of the wide flight of steps; she was going to speak,—Nathalie checked her.

“I cannot stay.—I am in a great hurry.—I cannot.”

They descended silently. At the bottom of the steps extended an open space with a row of trees on either side, and several wooden benches standing in the shade; mothers brought their children there in the day-time, but the spot was silent and lonely now. Rose arrested her sister as she was hurriedly walking on.

“We will sit here awhile,” said she, pointing to one of the benches.

“But I cannot, Rose; I am in a great hurry.”

“Why did you not call in?”

“Madame Marceau is worse, much worse; let me go.”

“Why were you weeping in the chapel?” persisted Rose.

Her sister did not answer, but Rose, who still held her arm, could feel her trembling.

“What has happened?” asked Rose.

“Nothing,” replied Nathalie, avoiding her sister’s searching glance; “the night air is chill. Let me go.”

“The air is clear and mild; if you object to sitting we can walk up and down: but we shall not part thus.”

There was a pause.

“Be it so,” at length said Nathalie, in a wholly

altered tone ; “ yes, as well now as later ; yes, we will sit down and you shall hear me.”

They seated themselves on a bench as she spoke ; Nathalie raised her veil, and, looking at her sister with a pale, determined face, she said, briefly :

“ Rose, first know this—namely, that my resolve is taken ; that much as I love and respect you, not all you can urge or entreat shall prevail against my will.”

“ And what is that will ?” asked Rose, seeing that she paused.

“ I am going to marry.”

Rose remained speechless ; she took both her sister’s hands in her own, and eyed her attentively ; their looks met, but Nathalie’s face remained unaltered : the pale brow, fixed glance, and compressed lip, still told the same resolute will she had so clearly expressed, but they told no more. Neither the blush of the willing bride, nor the trembling fear of the unwilling one, were there.

“ To marry whom ?” at length asked Rose.

“ The son of Madame Marceau.”

“ To marry him, Nathalie ! what do you mean ?”

“ What I say, Rose.”

“ Do you mean to say you are going to marry the

nephew of Monsieur de Sainville?" asked Rose, slightly bending forward.

Nathalie pressed her hand to her brow, but she calmly replied :

"Yes, Rose, I mean it."

There was a pause.

"Where is Monsieur Marceau?" quietly asked Rose.

"At Sainville."

"Has he been long there?"

"A few days."

"And he has asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, Rose, he has."

"And you are actually going to marry him?"

"I already told you so."

"You amaze me. Marry him!"

"For heaven's sake, Rose, do not be always repeating it."

"Does Madame Marceau consent?" continued Rose, without heeding this.

"Yes, she consents."

"And Monsieur de Sainville?" said Rose, slowly looking up at Nathalie.

"And pray what has Monsieur de Sainville to do with this?" asked Nathalie, biting her lip, but steadily meeting her sister's glance.

“ Has *he* consented ?” calmly inquired Rose.

“ Who cares about his consent ?” angrily exclaimed Nathalie ; “ I do not, Rose, mind—I do not.”

“ Then he has refused !” quickly said Rose.

Her sister smiled bitterly.

“ Refused ! Oh ! Rose, you do not know him. Why, this is a matter that does not concern him ; to refuse would be to meddle, to interfere : and he is too wise to do either.”

“ And you will be his niece ?” resumed Rose, in a low tone.

Nathalie rose abruptly.

“ Why not ?” she feverishly exclaimed ; “ why not—why does it surprise you, Rose ? What do you mean by being so surprised ?”

Rose did not answer the question ; but she eyed her sister steadily, as she said, in her lowest, but most distinct tones :

“ Do you love Monsieur Marceau ?”

There was a pause.

“ I suppose I do ,” at length replied Nathalie.

“ Speak plainly : do you love him ?” Her voice rose ; but that of Nathalie sank, as she replied :

“ Why marry him, if I did not ?”

They stood together in the pale moonlight ; the

elder sister bending a fixed and searching look on the younger one.

“I ask you, Nathalie, if you love that man?” repeated Rose, with increasing earnestness.

“Rose,” answered Nathalie, after a pause, “love is a strong word. Do women always marry for love—do they not rather marry, in order to secure a position and a home?”

“How worldly you have become!” ejaculated Rose: “a position and a home! Have you made conditions for either? No—then what home, what position will you have, if Monsieur de Sainville marries?”

“He will not,” said Nathalie, abruptly looking up.

“How do you know?”

“His sister told me so,” slowly replied the young girl.

“Is she your only authority?”

“He will not marry, Rose. He had, years ago, a disappointment—no matter what—he will not marry.”

“A disappointment years ago!” echoed Rose; “what of that! Are you such a child, as to think that would influence him still? What is a first love? a breath, a dream; if it is thus even for women, what is it for men?

“ He love again ! Impossible, Rose : he is a stone.”

“ I did not speak of love ; it is not likely a man of his age would yield to that childish passion : men seldom marry for love after twenty-five—they cease to care, and believe in it, and yet they marry.”

“ Why, then, did he not marry ?” asked Nathalie.

“ Probably because he was devoted to a task which forbade him from thinking of marriage. That task is over now ; do you imagine he is going to devote himself to a cheerless and solitary life ? His sister may do all she can to have it so ; but if she fails—if he does marry, what position will you hold in Sainville, as his niece, or rather as the wife of a nephew, no longer his heir !”

“ Rose, you are pitiless,” exclaimed Nathalie, in a broken tone ; “ he married, and I residing at Sainville as the wife of his nephew ! Oh ! you are pitiless !”

“ If you loved your future husband,” inflexibly said Rose, “ the prospect of a lost inheritance would not move you so.”

“ Love ! and why on earth should I love ?” bitterly exclaimed Nathalie. “ Men do not love, you say,—and I believe it ; why then should women ? To consume their heart in desires for ever unfulfilled.

Oh ! Rose, you have too often warned me against this folly."

Rose laid her hand on her sister's arm.

" I will tell you why a woman should love her husband," she said calmly, " it is lest she should love another man. You think me cold and severe ; perhaps I am so ; the sorrows of a love-sick girl I might not pity much ; I know how quickly they pass away. But, oh ! Nathalie, I could pity, deeply pity, the woman striving against a guilty passion. Alas ! how easily does the love that is permitted yield to weariness and time, but how fatal and enduring is the love that is forbidden ; a fire ever hid, yet ever burning in the heart. But you say, perhaps, ' I will not love thus.' Do not deceive yourself ; you are not cold or calm ; mere domesticity will not charm you ; if you do not love your husband, you will love some other."

" I will not," angrily cried Nathalie ; " I will not ; you insult me, Rose."

" I never said you would yield to your feelings, and sin ; but do not mistake human freedom ; our actions alone are ours, not, alas ! our passions and our desires. Will can conquer love or hate ; but it cannot annihilate them ; either may perish, but not through us, Nathalie ; not through us. Oh ! they are relentless.

enemies, with whom there is no truce and no peace ; who feed on the inward strife they themselves create. Brethren they will not be ; nothing can they be save pitiless tyrants or rebellious slaves. And have you ever imagined what it is to belong to one man and to love another ? to strive daily, hourly, against a passion that might have been perfectly innocent, but which one fatal error in your life has rendered for ever guilty ? I grant that you subdue that passion ; do you know at what cost the bitter victory is won ? Do you know what sort of a feeling it is to subdue one's own heart, and feel its life-strings breaking ? You have heard of martyrs ! know that there are martyrs of the soul, whose agony the eye of God has alone beheld. Have you the faith, the fervour, the strength to endure that martyrdom ? Oh ! Nathalie, that struggle has unfathomed depths of bitterness, and you will have to drink of those bitter waters to the very dregs ; your fate is before you ; choose ! ”

“ I will marry him ! ” said Nathalie, in a low and resolute tone ; and she looked up, and met her sister’s glance unshrinkingly.

“ You will marry him ? ” sorrowfully echoed Rose.

“ Rose,” calmly replied her sister, “ you have said many true things, but omitted others quite as true. Passions strive not only against us, but amongst

themselves ; strong are love and hate, but pride is mightier far ; she can conquer both, and lay them,—struggling and rebellious if you will,—but subdued, nay, prostrate, beneath her feet. Think of that, and fear not for me.”

She spoke with subdued energy, but with the energy of will, not that of emotion ; no flush rose to her brow, no light kindled in her eyes, the very tones of her voice were equal and low, as she stood there, calm and pale, in the moonlight,—it was as if some icy spell had fallen on that once fiery and vehement nature.

“ I will pray for you,” said Rose, who saw that, for the present, at least, remonstrance was wholly useless.

And thus they parted.

Rose was in the room of her aunt on the following morning, when Désirée opened the door, and said briefly :

“ Your sister is below, she wants to speak to you.”

“ I should like to know what your sister wants with you at this hour ?” peevishly asked Madame Lavigne, with whom, since she had ceased to be merry, Nathalie had suddenly fallen into disgrace. “ You shall certainly not go until I am settled ; it is very selfish of your sister to call at this hour.”

It was a full half hour before she would allow Rose to depart; now she wanted a cushion,—now she wished for the table to be drawn towards her,—now there was an order to be given to Désirée; but at length she could find no further excuse for detaining her, and, not without a sharp recommendation not to be long away, she permitted her niece to go down.

As Rose paused near the door previous to opening it, she heard the sound of a hurried step within, pacing the room up and down; then there was a pause; her sister had stopped short, no doubt to listen. She opened: Nathalie was standing in the centre of the room with her eyes fastened on the door.

“Thank God! you are come,” she quickly said. “Oh! Rose, how could you keep me waiting so long?”

“What has happened?” asked Rose.

“Nothing, Rose. Why do you always think something has been happening?”

“But you have not come without a purpose.”

“No, Rose; the truth is,” she hesitatingly added, “I am not very well. Could I stay here—with you—for a few days?”

Rose looked at her with sorrowful seriousness.

“ You are not well, Nathalie ; but it is your soul, not your body, that is ailing. Oh ! child, you know not how to tell untruths, and this one is too absurd. What change has come since last night ? Why do you wish to be here ? ”

“ Because, God help me ! there is no other home for me,” exclaimed Nathalie, in a despairing tone, that went to the heart of her sister; but she said quietly :

“ And Sainville ! ”

“ Sainville ! ” echoed Nathalie, “ ay, it has been my home,—would it never had ! Oh ! fatal, very fatal, has been to me the hospitality of that house ! ”

And again she walked up and down the room, not weeping, but wringing her hands. The composure she had maintained on the preceding evening had now wholly vanished.

“ What, then, becomes of your marriage with Charles Marceau ? ” asked Rose, eyeing her fixedly.

Nathalie suddenly stood still.

“ If there is love or mercy in your soul,” she passionately cried, “ never speak of that marriage,—never couple that name with mine.”

“ Have you quarrelled with him ? ” inquired Rose.

“ Quarrelled ! and with him ? No,” almost disdainfully replied Nathalie.

“Then it is something between you and his mother?” persisted Rose.

Her sister shook her head with impatient denial.

“Or with Monsieur de Sainville?” continued Rose.

Nathalie turned round, as if something had stung her.

“It is not,” she cried, angrily; “it is not. With him! Why, what has he to do with all this? Why do you always,—why does every one always taunt me with his name? I cannot understand it; I do not know what is meant by it; I will not allow it, Rose.”

Her dark eyes lit, and her lips trembled, as she spoke.

“You have given me no answer,” she added, after a pause; “can I, or can I not, stay here? It will not be for long.”

“You can stay,” replied Rose.

“And what will your aunt say?”

“I cannot tell. She will be vexed,—exasperated, perhaps.”

“Then I will not come here, to be the source of trouble to you,” sadly said Nathalie.

“But you shall come and stay,” persisted her sister. “Have I no right in the house, where my

youth has been spent and wasted for so many years ? You shall stay, Nathalie."

The young girl seemed to breathe more freely ; but as she sat down, and looked around her, her eyes filled with tears.

" There was a time," she said, in a low tone, " when I pitied you, Rose, for being buried in this living tomb ; for then I rejoiced in the life and light of another dwelling : but now I am glad to come and share with you, in the shadow and gloom of this place ; and it almost seems as if either could not be too heavy or too dark for me."

" That it is all over between you and Charles Marceau, I can see," said Rose, walking up to her sister, and laying her hand on her shoulder ; " yet you say that you have not quarrelled. How is this ?"

The head of Nathalie drooped on her bosom.

" How can I tell you ?" she replied at length ; " there is such a thing as a sudden awakening ; and if I have awakened, will you reprove me, Rose ?"

" No, assuredly ; but what did he say ?"

" Of whom are you speaking ?" asked Nathalie, evidently troubled.

" Of Charles Marceau, of course."

" He said nothing ; because, to tell you the truth, he knows nothing."

Rose stepped back, in some surprise.

“Does he still consider you as his affianced wife?” she quickly asked.

Nathalie hesitated; but she at length answered:

“No.”

“But you contradict yourself, Nathalie.”

“I do not, Rose. I had asked for time to reflect; he granted it; but though my resolve was fixed, my actual reply was not yet given, when we spoke together last night; therefore he knows nothing.”

“And does any one at the château know that you have left?”

“They must know it now.”

“But you left by stealth, without explanation! Oh! Nathalie.”

“How did I know I could stay here with you, Rose? Besides, I can write now.”

She rose, brought forward writing materials, and an old mahogany desk, wrote a few lines, and was folding up her letter, when Rose quietly said:

“Let me see what you have written, Nathalie.”

The young girl silently handed her the note.

“So,” said Rose, after glancing over it, “you merely tell Madame Marceau that you are staying for a few days with me. Oh! Nathalie, why not

say frankly, 'I leave, because I cannot marry your son.' "

"I shall tell her so in a few days," replied Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Tell her now."

"I will not, I will not, Rose," replied Nathalie, speaking calmly, but with a sudden change of look and tone that reminded her sister of the preceding evening.

"And why so?"

"I will not," again said Nathalie.

Rose saw it would be useless to remonstrate. She took the letter, folded it up, and said, quietly :

"I shall take it."

Nathalie looked confounded—almost alarmed.

"Do not, Rose, do not," she quickly exclaimed.

"I cannot send Désirée, my aunt would not allow it; but I can go myself," very calmly replied Rose, who now looked fully as determined as Nathalie to consult her own will.

No more was said; but as Rose, after going up to her own room, came down again, and stood in the dark passage, in the act of opening the street-door, the sound of a light step behind her made her look round. It was Nathalie; she was standing at the head of the staircase, with its gloom behind her, and

her brown dress falling down to her feet: even in that dull light, which scarcely revealed the outlines of her figure, she looked anxious and pale.

“ Rose,” said she in a low tone, “ do not see Madame Marceau ; it is better not.”

“ Do you think so?” calmly said Rose.

“ Yes, indeed, I do ; pray see no one.”

“ Do not make yourself uneasy,” quietly answered her sister, as she went out and closed the door.

An hour had elapsed, yet Rose returned not ; at length Nathalie, who sat anxiously by the window, beheld her entering the narrow court. Her heart sank within her, and in spite of all her efforts to look and remain calm, a marble pallor overspread her features, as, after a few minutes, Rose entered the room. Neither spoke. Nathalie silently looked up at her sister, who did not seem to heed the glance. The face of Rose wore its usual expression, and she took up her work and sat down in her place in entire silence.

Nathalie rose, walked to the other end of the room, suddenly came back to her sister, and said in a low breathless tone,—

“ Well, Rose?”

Rose looked up very calmly.

“ What is it?” she asked.

“ Have you nothing to tell me?”

“ Little or nothing.”

“ Did you see Madame Marceau ?”

“ Yes, I saw her.”

Nathalie’s countenance fell.

“ Who was with her ?” she quickly asked.

“ No one,” laconically replied Rose.

“ What did she say ?” hesitatingly resumed Nathalie after a pause.

“ She read your letter, and uttered a few smooth unmeaning phrases, no more.”

“ And that was all ?” said Nathalie, seeming much relieved.

“ No,” gravely replied Rose, “ that was not all. As I reached the gate her son overtook me ; he had just left his mother, and seen your letter.”

“ Well, what did he want ?” calmly asked Nathalie, as her sister paused and looked up into her face.

“ I will repeat his own words.—‘ Pray tell Mademoiselle Montolieu,’ said he quietly, ‘ that I am only too happy to wait for her reply, however long it may be deferred.’ ”

“ He said that,” exclaimed Nathalie, with something like scorn.

“ Yes, Nathalie, he said that ; but do not deceive

yourself; if that man loved you once, he does not love you now."

Nathalie gave her sister a startled look.

"What do you mean?" she said in a faltering tone.

"That Monsieur Marceau does not love you."

"Then why show himself so submissive, so humble, Rose?" asked Nathalie in a low voice.

"I cannot tell; but soft as was his tone, humble as was his speech, there was still something sinister in his eye as he spoke and uttered your name."

"But why should he wish to marry me if not for love?" urged Nathalie, who was very pale, though she spoke so calmly.

"Perchance for hatred," replied Rose; "I have heard of such things. Nay, for all I know, he may have many motives."

She ceased. Nathalie had grasped her arm, as if for support; she was deadly pale, and her quivering lips told the intensity of her emotion.

"Rose," she said in a low tone, dropping her glance and commanding her agitation as she spoke, "we have had enough of this."

"Yes," sorrowfully answered Rose, laying down her work to look at her, "I think we have."

CHAPTER XI.

A very graphic account might easily be given of the wrath of Madame Lavigne, on learning that Nathalie had come to stay for some time in her house; but as mere ill-temper has in itself nothing peculiarly attractive, it is sufficient to state, that the aunt of Rose was highly indignant with her niece, and declared Nathalie should not remain.

“ You may have it so,” calmly said Rose, “ For this house, is certainly your house; but if Nathalie leaves it, I leave it also.”

The blind woman heard her with silent wonder. That quiet decided voice told her Rose meant what she said, and as she desired nothing less than the departure of her niece, she felt compelled to submit;

but indemnified herself by indulging in double her usual amount of grumbling. She was the more vexed that Nathalie, though the cause of all this strife, said not a word to please or conciliate her. She listened to all her complaints and reproaches in unmoved silence, assisting Rose in her work, and never once raising her eyes from it. Thus the day passed.

At nine, Rose left her seat, folded up her work, and said :

“ We must go to bed.”

They proceeded up a steep staircase to the little room, occupied by Rose. It was meanly and scantily furnished ; a narrow bed, a chair, a small deal table, and a crucifix were all this nunlike cell contained. Rose laid down the light she held, saying :

“ I am going to my aunt’s room ; I shall soon return, but do not wait for me.”

She glided out of the room, and was gone.

Nathalie began to undress, but other thoughts came to her ; she sat down on the chair, and buried her forehead in her hands. The whole house was silent, save in the next room, where she could hear, as a low indistinct sound, the ill-tempered scolding of Madame Lavigne, and the quiet replies of the patient Rose. But she heard without listening ; the two voices came to her as in a dream.

“ You are weeping,” at length said a voice. It was Rose.

Nathalie looked up; she was pale, but her eyes were tearless.

“ No, I am not weeping,” was her brief reply, “ why should I weep?”

Rose did not answer. She went up to the window, drew down the curtain, then came back again, and stopping before her sister, said briefly:

“ You have a proud and haughty heart, Nathalie; know you not such pride is sinful? I have watched you all day long, not soliciting the confidence you would not grant; and I have seen you inflicting on yourself the most acute misery, in order to look indifferent and calm.”

“ I am calm,” interrupted Nathalie, rising as she spoke.

“ Calm!” echoed her sister, eyeing her fixedly: “ why then are you so pale? why is your look so troubled, your smile so dreary? Oh! Nathalie! Nathalie! did you think to deceive me?”

Nathalie looked up; her brow, late so pale, became flushed, her lips trembled.

“ What do you mean, Rose?” she asked.

“ I mean that I know all: I mean that I know—”

“ You know nothing,” cried Nathalie, interrupting

her, "it is not true ; no one would believe you ; ask me nothing, I will confess nothing ; you know nothing, Rose."

Her sister did not reply, but she looked at her with a glance, as sad as it was penetrating.

"Oh ! Rose ! do not look at me so," exclaimed the young girl averting her flushed face, and clasping her trembling hands, "do not with that keen searching look. You are like Madame Marceau now ; say something, do not look so silently."

"What shall I say ?" gently asked Rose.

"No, no, say nothing," replied her sister ; "be merciful : not a word, a hint, or rather a whisper, and do not look so ; it tortures me."

She buried her face in her hands and sat down on the edge of the bed, her whole frame shaking with the intensity of her emotion. Rose eyed her with deep sorrow ; her features had lost their habitual calmness ; she walked up and down the room, with evident agitation ; at length she stopped before her sister, sat down by her side, and drawing her towards her, said in a low and compassionate tone :

"Alas ! poor child, woman's sorrows have fallen on you early, very early."

Nathalie tried to look calm, to feel calm ; but she

had struggled with her feelings too long, and laying her head on the shoulder of Rose, she wept long and bitterly. Her sister soothed her with a tenderness she had not anticipated. She spoke to her gently, without reproach or useless argument; compassionately as a mother might speak to a sorrowing child. She asked no questions, but her kind caresses did more than inquiries; at first Nathalie spoke only in broken confessions; but gradually she became more frank and unreserved: half confidence was not in her character; she should tell all or nothing. Rose heard her sadly, but without surprise.

“I knew it long ago,” she said, “before you, perhaps; but what availed it? What warnings have ever warded off the love of youth? I saw he had taken on your imagination the dangerous hold no man ever takes in vain on the mind of woman—a hold the more dangerous and secure, that he did not seem to seek it. But I hoped time would show you that all this was folly; that his coldness, or his pride, would end by repelling you.”

“Oh! Rose,” exclaimed Nathalie, in a low tone, “it was that pride charmed and undid me; that pride which never verges into haughtiness, which does not repel, yet seeks not to win, subdues irresistibly. It is a strange thing for a woman to feel

that she may be fair and young in vain ! strange—ay, and dangerous.”

“ But surely you knew from the first he was one it was hard, if not impossible, to win !”

“ Rose, did you ever read the fairy tale of a proud princess, who could not love, unless where she was not loved, and whose haughty heart bled only until it broke with mingled pride and grief?”

“ Oh ! child, I understand it less and less : there are many imperfections in his character, and you never seemed blind to them !”

“ Blind ! no, for I was always seeking for them as eagerly as if I had been a secret enemy set to watch for and seek them out. Perilous search, which I in my folly thought so harmless ! How little risk I should have run had he been perfect : how soon I should have wearied of seeing him always do that which was right, admired him of course, and thought of something else. Though he does not, it is true, do wrong, yet his impulses and feelings are not always what they should be : but then his judgment rules them with a sway of iron. I soon learned that he who looked so calm was not so ; that he was a perpetual contradiction : proud, he yet forbears to wound the pride of others ; passionate, he never utters an angry word. The language of worldly

wisdom is ever on his lips, and his life is filled with traits of the most romantic generosity. But though I gradually discovered all this, I could never understand him thoroughly ; for he is harsh, severe, and as implacable to others as he is to himself, which is saying no little. One cannot know him long, without feeling that there is a perpetual warfare carried on within him. Cold as he seems, he has to strive against himself to remain so. You feel it, and you watch anxiously, to see which of the two principles shall conquer in the coming contest : shall passion prevail, or shall will ? Oh ! Rose, he is a book to read on for ever, without wearying. You are lured on, you know not how, nor why ; still baffled, yet not repelled, and there is the charm—there is the danger."

" But, child, he is so cold," gently said Rose ; " he is incapable of love, for instance."

" No, Rose."

" No ?"

" No, he loved years ago. It is a long story ; she was his cousin, very beautiful and faithless ; he proved harsh and pitiless. His aunt says she died of grief. Oh ! why did his aunt and Madame de Jussac tell me so much ? Why was he from that day linked in my mind with the most kindly feeling

in humanity ! Why could I no longer think him all harshness and severity ? He had loved once ; I could read how deeply, by the very sternness of his resentment. Had he loved since then ? Would he ever love again ? How was he when he loved ?—how did he seem ?—how did he feel ? These thoughts haunted and troubled my heart long before I knew why. His aunt had also said no woman could love him ; this made me wonder if it were true. Had she loved him ?—if not, why die of grief ? Had he loved her truly ? I thought so ; yet who could tell ? Did that marble repose, which I read on his brow, dwell also in his heart ? Was all as still there as it looked to the outward eye ? Was he one of those iron men—for there are such—whom a being, pure as an angel, loving as a woman, fair as a lily, yet not too pure and fair to cherish ; something peerless, and yet quite human—was he one of those whom such a being would have failed to win ? in whose lives women act no part, but bloom and wither in a day, like brief summer flowers ? I thought so sometimes ; at others I doubted. I knew it was in that château of Sainville he had loved. The thought pursued me ; the shadow of that love, which ended in bitterness and grief, was over that dwelling, and its old garden : it often saddened me, as I thought, for her sake. There

was a bench near the river where he would sit, until the stars grew dim. Had he sat there with her on cool summer evenings long ago? There were flowers in the green-house which he loved; was anything of her memory connected with them? Had she tended those same flowers less pure, less lovely than herself; and did he love them still, for something of her sake? How had he felt, when he first returned to this home of his youth and early affection? Had he been drawn back there by the mysterious instinct that attracts us towards the spot that beheld our first joys and our first sorrows? Had a vision risen before him as he crossed that threshold, beautiful still, in spite of broken faith, of years elapsed, and of the dark shadow of an early grave? or had he beheld all again unmoved? Had time done its work, and effaced her memory from his heart, as well as from the old garden where I never found one lingering trace of her being,—where all vestige of her had passed away, like the mark of her light foot-prints from the earth? And then came the thought: “I, too, am young; and, unless I have been much deceived, well nigh as fair as she once was: and this house, for some time at least, is my home. Must my fate be like hers? Have youth and beauty no better, no happier destiny? Is all over with a few brief years;

and when the gates of death have closed upon us, are we to be forgotten, as she is now? Must the spots we most loved, which are filled with the glorious and fervent dreams of our youth, know us no more? and oh! far sadder thought, shall the hearts where we had made our inward home,—shall these, too, forget us, or remember us merely as the pale, scarcely earthly creations of a long-forgotten dream?"

"Hush!" gently said Rose, "you are feverish, hush!"

"Rose, let me speak; I have been silent long; it will do me good. I am not ill, as you think. Never was life more keenly awake within me than it is now. I hear with acute distinctness, and see with dazzling vividness. Nor is the inward sense less wakeful. Thoughts crowd to me, and language comes—all clear as noonday light; let me speak."

"Then answer me this question," resumed Rose; "how could this deep interest in a stranger fail to enlighten you?"

Nathalie shook her head sadly.

"It did not," she replied; "because I was simple, credulous, and ignorant; I had no actual experience, and books had taught me nothing. How is it, Rose, that you always read in books of the love a woman receives, and so seldom of that which she feels? I

had dreamed of those things as girls will dream; I had imagined myself beloved; I had not reflected that I would probably love in my turn. I had beheld a lover sighing at my feet; it never occurred to me that I might love in vain; because those dreams were all of vanity and not one of them came from the heart. I would have been on my guard with Charles Marceau, who loved me; but Monsieur de Sainville was so indifferent and so cold that I never dreamed of being on my guard with him. I exercised not the least influence over him, and he, without seeking it, ruled me completely. I secretly made him my judge. I sought to do that which he would approve, to avoid that which he might censure. I learned to read praise or blame in his look; and how often, when I was on the point of doing or saying some foolish thing, has that look checked and subdued me."

"But there was a time when he was indifferent to you," persisted Rose.

"Ay, a time that now seems vague and indistinct, like a dream."

"You disliked him very much at first."

Nathalie did not answer. She still sate on the edge of the bed, near her sister, one arm passed around the neck, and her head half reclining against the shoulder of Rose. Her eyelids drooped, a faint,

rosy hue spread over her pale features, and her lips trembled with a half-formed smile; the smile of the girl who feels how much wiser she is in knowledge of the heart than the older woman.

“ You disliked him at first,” reiterated Rose.

“ How do you know, Rose?” was the low reply.

“ How! Why you told me so; besides you were always abusing him.”

“ And you defended him, Rose.”

“ Did you abuse him to hear him defended?” asked Rose, with a sudden suspicion. “ Oh! Nathalie! I thought you frank, incapable of deceit!”

“ Rose, be not angry. It was not you I wished to deceive, but myself. Are you a woman, and do you not understand the mysterious instinct and ceaseless desire to conceal some things for ever in the depths of the heart?”

Whatever Rose might think, she knew at least this was no time to chide. Nathalie resumed:

“ It always seemed so hopeless, Rose, that it was not hard to deceive myself; because my heart could have no hope, I foolishly thought it could have no desires.”

“ And he was besides so high above you,” added Rose.”

“ It was not that,” exclaimed Nathalie, looking up

with a sudden flush of pride. “I could have the heart to love a king, were he worthy of it.”

“But what was it drew you towards him?”

“No one thing in particular, Rose. Love is not one, but a silent and secret gathering of many things unto the heart.”

“Still there must have been something: what was it?”

“Power, perhaps; that art which he possesses of swaying whatever comes within his sphere; of making others lay themselves bare before him, whilst he himself remains silent, almost unmoved, and still keeping his own secret. Perchance it was this sort of mystery that attracted me. It exercises a peculiar fascination on all; even his simple and artless aunt feels it; she has spoken of him to me repeatedly, as “that person,” never daring to mention him more openly; never suspecting that I saw more in what she told me than she herself, good simple creature, could perceive. I sometimes think there was a conspiracy, not of man but of destiny, to draw me towards him, and, whether I would or not, to compel me to love. His aunt, his sister, Madame de Jussac, and even that foolish Amanda, could not speak without dropping vague hints, which made me look on him as a living enigma,—guessed by many, read by

none. When I came here, you always spoke of him first: your aunt taunted me with his name,—his name which I could never hear or utter without a secret thrill, I will not say of joy, but of something far deeper, between pleasure and pain. Thus it came to pass, that I thought of him much at first, constantly afterwards, and that I ceased to wonder at a thought so continuous. Alas! it was an old story,—girlhood's folly ending in woman's love. I now see that the life I led in that old château was dangerously dull: what had I to think of or to do, save to dream my youth away? Oh! let blame ever fall lightly on her who feels outward life so cold and so cheerless, that she must needs make her heart and its visionary world her home. Are we denied reality, and shall we not even dream? What heart of stone first framed that law? What heart, more senseless still, first obeyed it? I said that the life I led there was dangerously dull; outwardly it was, but never was my inward life more full, more active, more vivid. In those dreams, which wove a wonderful romance from the slightest threads of reality, I often beheld one unlike any I had seen before, serious, cold, and impenetrable; I gave him no name, not even in my thoughts, but I placed him in imaginary perils, and strove to guess how he would brave and conjure them by the mere force

of his will. I saw him oppressed, but unconquered ; ruined, scorned, but haughty and defiant still. And then, when fate and misfortune had done their worst, I placed a woman on his path ; I did not make her fair, or seek to ask myself what was her aspect, but I put faith, love, and reverence for him in her heart ; and she sat by the place near which he was to pass, not seeking or alluring, but patient, modest, and womanlike. Oh, Rose ! how is it that as I speak, that day-dream thrills through my heart ? How is it that I see her there watching his coming, and thinking ' will he let me be something to him ; will he let me soothe him in his sorrow, and walk through life by his side, his patient, faithful shadow ? ' Vain hope ! He draws near as proud, as unsubdued as ever ; wrapt in his own thoughts he sees her not, and passes on. He sees her not, though she has sat there for many a day, patiently waiting his expected coming ! Rose, I have dreamed that dream over and over, and wondered why I was charmed by its bitterness. Sometimes it changed ; sometimes he saw her, paused, and spoke :—‘ My poor child,’ he wondering said, ‘ what are you doing here ? many have passed by ; for whom are you waiting thus alone when the night is closing in ? ’ Seeing that she made no reply, he guessed the truth, and remonstrated with her with

gentle kindness. ‘What! waiting for me! Oh, girl! what blindness has seized you? You wish to console me, and how do you know that I have any sorrow to soothe? Look at me well: do I seem one of those who need a woman’s ministering love? Love! I have no faith in it! it is a folly, a delusion, a dream; and if you are young and beautiful, what is it to me! What do I care for loveliness, and for the freshness of early years? What even for the unsought love which lives in your heart? Do I not know that youth and beauty fade? that love, like all which is born, must die? Be reasonable; think of some other,—forget me.’ And if she, unhappy girl, persists in her folly, if she vows that love, that her love, is no dream,—that it will live through life and endure beyond the grave,—he only smiles with the sadness a truer knowledge gives, and bidding her a kind and cold farewell, he leaves her there alone with her despairing grief. And if all this was a dream, that sorrow, Rose, was at least real, for a day came when, wilfully blind as I was, I yet confessed to myself that he was that man, and I, alas! that desolate, unloved girl for whom I wept.

“Oh! Rose, you do not, cannot know the strange feeling it is to love one, who not only cannot love you, but who refuses to believe in love. Sometimes

I said to myself: ‘he is not so sceptical as he seems; yes, I can read lingering regret in all his doubting; yes, if he could he would gladly return to the divine fountain we drink of in youth; yes, he would love and live again. That he believes in God and honour I know well; and that there is much of noble feeling in his soul, and of high goodness in his heart, I know better still. Could that weak, faithless woman win all the love he had to bestow? All?’ And her image rose before me, and I asked myself if she had been so very fair? Alas! she had. How often have I gazed at her portrait, and felt jealous of that beauty which had passed away from earth, in all its dazzling freshness, to haunt him still beyond the grave, and make every other woman look pale and dim in his sight! For who could tell whether death had not, with strange power, restored his love to her, even as it had given her that gift of eternal youth and loveliness which time would have so ruthlessly faded? Other women might be fair; what matter? their beauty would fade; hers endured. Oh! there are strange contradictions in the human heart! He had cast her from him; but this did not prove he did not love her. Might she not have become to him as the memory of Eden became to sinful and sorrowing Eve?—a green oasis lost for ever, but clothed with an

immortal beauty that made all the perishable gardens of earth seem as dreary deserts !

“ Oh ! Rose, do you think me mad, or do you understand me ? Can you guess that the thoughts, the doubts, which torture love, are also those which feed it ? Had I been sure of anything, hope might have perished at once ; vanity or pride might have cured me. But I knew nothing. I was tossed on a sea of uncertainty, beyond which, on a distant shore, smiled a hope, oh ! how fair, that beckoned and lured me on through every doubt and danger. I resisted ; I called pride to my aid ; I said I would not love one who cared not for me ; but again I became weak, and declaring it was too late, I closed my eyes and surrendered myself to the stream. There was a strange and perilous pleasure in feeling myself carried down by that rapid current, without knowing whether it would lead me to the blest haven of rest, or wreck me for ever on the rocky shore of despair. And thus deluded by the syren Hope, and far more by my own heart, still blind to the severe truth before me, I gave myself up to the most delirious dream my youth had yet known. If the delirium was guilty, bitter has been the awakening. Bitter was the day on which I felt, ‘ beautiful I may be, but not for him ; I can charm other looks, many perchance, but not his.’

Oh ! Rose, there lies the depth of my despair, there is the ever-renewing source of my bitter sorrow ; for if I were plain, I might have fed my heart with thoughts of how I could have won him had God made me fair ; but now I feel that youth and beauty have both been mine in vain. Oh ! why is this ? Why have I not the nameless grace which is not beauty, but possesses a power far beyond,—the charm that would have subdued his proud heart, and, whether he would or not, have made it mine ? Why could his least word make me blush and tremble, whilst he remained unmoved though I was near ? Oh ! worthless is the loveliness unseen by the eye of those we love. Oh ! sister, sister, pity me ! ”

She wept, and for awhile her half-stifled sobs broke on the silence of the narrow room ; but she soon became hushed again ; it was Rose, who spoke next.

“ Alas ! ” said she in a sorrowful tone, “ I have turned over another page of the old story of woman’s wasted love and youth. I knew it, but still it is hard to watch a being daily growing up in purity and grace, and to know from the first, what the end will be.”

She seemed to address her own thoughts, and not Nathalie. There was a pause.

“ Did you then know what the end would be ? ” at length asked her sister

“ I did, child. The beginning of the story may vary ; the end is still the same : disappointment.”

“ But did you know how it would end in this case ?”

“ Any one could have known it. You such a child, he so grave and severe ; any one could have known it.”

“ Who can tell ? who knows ?” murmured Nathalie, in a low tone.

“ What !” incredulously exclaimed Rose.

“ Who knows !” repeated her sister.

“ Oh ! child ! do not deceive yourself,” gently urged Rose, “ do not. Believe me I have seen him little, but I can tell you this : A man like him will never love one so young.”

Nathalie raised her head from the shoulder of Rose, and shook it gently, whilst her lips parted with a smile of sadness, half blending with triumph.

“ You cannot tell, Rose,” she said, “ you cannot tell ; you have not sat in the same room with him, evening after evening. You have not learned to divine the hidden sense of his coldest tones, and to read the meaning of his calmest glances. You have not blushed over a page your eye saw, but did not read because you felt that another’s look was reading far more surely every passing thought and feeling on

your brow. You have not rebelled at length against this inquisition, and looked up to brave the smile, kind, yet conscious, that still seemed to say: 'No maiden's heart is a mystery to me.'"

"What! does he love you then?" interrupted Rose.

"Alas! I do not, I dare not say so," despondingly replied her sister, "to like and love are vastly different. I think he liked me, a liking that might perhaps have ripened into love, but he is severe, and I was weighed, found wanting, and rejected, not in word, but in deed."

"But awhile ago you spoke of his utter indifference."

"Rose the heart has two creeds: Despair and hope, often equally wide of truth. It believes either, in that which it most dreads, or in that which it passionately desires to be true. Sometimes I say to myself: 'I am mad: he care for me! Oh folly!' and at other times hope whispers to my heart: 'Why not?' and she bids me remember gentle words, kind smiles, and lingering looks, that all rush back to me with a strange bewildering meaning. I feel those remembrances are too intoxicating to be true, and yet too vivid to be merely the dreams of a longing heart. More I might have known, but you will wonder perhaps when I tell you, I would not. I thought of

him constantly, and shunned his presence. I have hidden in the garden when I knew him to be there; I have lingered in the gloom of the staircase lest I should meet him. Daring I may be, but I am not of those who court a man's notice, and go half way to meet the love they most longed for. Like the imaginary maiden of my dream, I may sit by the roadside and wait in silent hope, but though I should die of grief, I will not move one step to meet or utter one word to arrest him. Sometimes I thought he was almost vexed; at other times I fancied this reserve, which was not shyness, piqued, but did not displease him."

"Did he seek to meet you?" asked Rose.

"No. He was my host, and never forgot it; but when we did meet he seemed to me a little nettled, and perhaps offended at the opportunities I seized to shorten our meetings. It was not prudery, far less mistrust; but I had a mortal fear of betraying myself in a way I should ever repent. Generous in some things he may be, but not in all. I have seen in him a strange desire to hide as carefully what he feels as to discover what is felt by others. If he ever loves, the woman must lay her heart bare before him, and be content with glimpses of his own. Now to this I would not submit; if he saw my folly, he should also see that I was neither forward nor unwomanly. I

kept aloof from him; a plan his sister favoured. Rose, Madame Marceau read my heart, its hopes, its wishes, but she never read its pride, or she had not fancied I needed watching. So foreign was such a thought to me, that at the time I never suspected I was suspected. Thus passed the winter; I saw him daily, never alone; but the heart makes its own solitude. When his sister slept, or feigned to sleep, when we both sat near the hearth, reading silently, was it with him as with me, and did his thoughts wander from the unread page into that visionary world which had become my second life? Alas! to this hour I cannot tell. Was he not a serious man, too grave for the thoughts that might haunt a dreaming girl? Oh! Rose, I fear that when women are deceived in men, it is often—I do not say always—because they judge of them as of themselves, and attribute to them feelings and phantasies that belong to the restless heart of woman alone; but as I said, thus passed the winter. Spring came; and one morning, when my hopes were as pure and fresh as that lovely spring time, Madame Marceau told me her brother had taken a resolve, a sort of vow, never to marry; his aunt confirmed it. A chill fell on my heart, yet, strange to say, I doubted. I asked myself ‘do men keep those vows which women so often

break? Who knows whether he, proud and cold as he looks, may not yet be glad to break his? Little time had I to think of this, for the very next day Charles Marceau returned. I had a presentiment that he would be fatal to me, and I resolved to leave at once. I met Monsieur de Sainville by chance in the library. I could scarcely repeat what he said, and yet at the time I thought, 'do men speak thus to a woman for whom they care not?' In spite of my reserve I let him see how deep was my faith in him, and he seemed pleased to be thus trusted, and exacted and obtained a promise implying still deeper trust. Oh! that I had kept to this faith! Rose, how shall I tell you the rest? You know me; you know that I am credulous and easily deceived by art—alas! another knows it too—but you do not know that woman. She asked me to marry her son; he came in to tell us his uncle had consented, and this latter consent stung me so deeply that I forgot to ask myself how that proud woman could have thought of me for her daughter, unless through the fear of a danger that would have been the realization of all my dreams. Then, when I was thus disturbed, did she for the first time let me see that she understood me.

"How can I tell you the look of her searching eyes, when she said, with a smile, that no woman

could deceive another. My heart lay, indeed, bare before her, to handle and pierce ; and what quivering nerve did she fail to touch, in order to win me over to her purpose ? Rose, do you think there is aught so cruel as one woman can be to another woman ? She spoke vaguely in hints that stung me one by one : ‘ it was not mere consent, it was approbation her brother had given ; he had long desired this marriage ; they had talked it over ; but he had urged delay, because he saw my weakness, and pitied it ; but I need not fear,—he was a man of honour.’ Most artfully did she blend that which was false with that which I knew to be true. In an unhappy moment, she wrung from me a bitter doubt of his honour ; but the next instant my faith had returned. I remembered his words, his looks ; they were not those which reluctant pity yields. I understood his reserve ; it was not coldness, it was delicacy that had kept him silent. Would I have had him become the rival of his own nephew,—of his dying sister’s son ?

“ He came in ; and before his calm look and plain speech, her falsehood stood revealed. A thrill of happiness went through my whole frame, when he denied having given more than a passive consent to the projected marriage ; when he declared I was the last woman he would have chosen for his nephew’s

wife. Oh! Rose, for one moment the cup of happiness was offered to my lip, and I drank eagerly of its rapturous flow; but how soon did her cruel hand snatch it from me. Though by so doing, she confirmed the proof of her treachery, she repeated every word I had heedlessly uttered. He remained indifferent until she came to that slur on his honour. My heart failed me; his look, his mien, all I knew of him, told me my doom was sealed for ever. Perhaps you think it was grief I felt then; ay, keen, poignant grief, but strangely mixed with a proud and bitter resentment. If he loved, he was too pitiless; if he did not love, what right had he to show himself so haughty and exacting? He had never wooed me, why did he now treat me like one rejected? This thought was like death,—oh! more bitter by far. What is death?—the pang of a moment: wounded love and pride bleed daily. And my pride was roused within me; I felt in a mood to do myself some mortal injury, in order to inflict on him one keen, sharp sorrow;—to marry his nephew, be miserable for my whole existence, and add to the story of his life another regret, and, perchance, a second and surer vow. I thought I saw where I could wound him, and I resolved to utter in his presence the words that should doom me, to see how

he would feel ; whether he would start, or colour, or turn pale, or betray, ay, even faintly, but I could have seen it, that those words affected him.

“ Madame Marceau spoke of me as ‘ her daughter.’ ‘ Then she has consented ?’ he involuntarily exclaimed, and fastened his look on me to read the reply in mine eyes. I bade my brow be clear, my look be steady, my whole aspect to bespeak calmness. I seemed not startled like one who has heard an untruth, but as composed as one who has heard a fact. Oh ! Rose, how I triumphed for one moment ! He started, and either the changeful light deceived me, or he turned pale. I triumphed ; yes, though I had resolved to seal my own fate—though my heart was breaking, I triumphed : for I thought that his heart, though so proud and haughty, was yet touched to the quick, and, in its turn, had felt the bitter sting of love scorned and rejected.”

The eyes of Nathalie kindled ; her cheeks were flushed, her lips compressed, as if the passion of that moment lived once more within her as she spoke.

“ Well ?” said Rose, interested. The countenance of her sister fell.

“ Alas !” she replied, with deep sadness, “ he had not startled, trembled, or turned pale ; he had only changed his attitude—it was only the doubtful light

of the obscured room that deceived me, as it fell on his features. In vain I looked, in vain I tried to detect again on his features that passing emotion: he had petrified himself. Now, if I chose, was the moment of my expected vengeance. Oh! Rose, what I felt then! I bowed my head, and half-closed my eyes like one who crosses a precipice, and who will not look on either side, because to look is to perish irretrievably. I would not grant him the triumph of hearing me once more refuse Charles; I had no longer the cruel courage of dooming myself to misery: I chose a medium course, and asked for time to reflect. Perhaps, in the secret folly of my heart, I thought to give him time to repent. Folly, indeed: that same day he left for a whole fortnight, without seeking to see me. I was in the *salon* with his sister; and pitiless as are all of that race, she bade me listen to the receding sound of his horse's hoofs. I did listen, and that sound, which was as the knell of my departed hopes, still seems to ring in my ear. Had that man ever cared for me? I knew not then, I know not now; but this I know—that my heart failed me, and my last hope perished from that hour. For three days I was calm enough. Charles Marceau was away; to become his wife did not seem so dreadful a fate. But on the fourth day he returned; and then I

knew it was not indifference I felt for him, but something almost akin to hatred. How I detested his dark, handsome face, and his voice of unbroken smoothness. I believe he saw it, for he tormented me to his heart's content ; his look never left me : there was ever some double meaning in his speech, and yet, with all this, there was also a strange sort of love, of desire to please, of involuntary homage, which irritated me more than all. It was a day such as I have never spent. ‘Wilt thou marry that man?’ ceasingly said a voice within me ; ‘wilt thou chain thyself for life to one whom thou loapest?’ In vain I strove not to hear or to heed ; to call in pride to quell that tumult in my soul, I could neither silence the cry of conscience, nor win peace. Towards evening I left the château, and went to the abbey-church. I thought that there I should be more free to think and decide, that some holy influence would subdue the strife within me. I knelt where you saw me, but besought in vain for courage to accomplish what I still persisted in considering my destiny : in vain I called wounded pride to my aid, the holy silence of that place still reproved me. I felt indignant at my own weakness. I resolved to take a vow of marrying the man I hated, for the sake of punishing, perhaps, the man I loved.”

“Did you take that vow?” asked Rose.

“No; I dared not. But I made myself an omen by which, come what would, I resolved to abide. Oh, Rose! I am no fatalist, but to feel deeply, is to deliver up heart and soul to every passing superstition: I said to myself, he is gone for a whole fortnight, it is impossible he should return, and because it is impossible, I will make that the condition of my vow. If he does not return, and I know that he will not, I will agree to-morrow to marry his nephew; if he does come back, it is a sign that I must not persist; that come what will, Charles Marceau must be nought to me. Alas! it is thus the heart ever makes its own fatality.”

Rose eyed her sister with mournful severity.

“Is it thus you understand prayer?” she said. “Oh! Nathalie, prayer is not what you deem, mere traffic with heaven. It is communion with the infinite and the divine; it is not a clinging to earth, but a raising of the spirit towards all eternal things.”

“Rose,” sorrowfully replied her sister, “you may feel it thus, but let those who pray for their sorrow to be removed hold another creed. The erring child can surely ask for its burden of misery to be lightened, and have we not a Father full of tenderness? Tell me not that the weak prayer of the sinner is not

heard as well as the pure aspiration of the just. There is in the despair of a breaking heart, though ever so guilty, a voice that will rise from earth and pierce the very depths of heaven ! How do you know that, as I knelt there, my soul darkened by earthly shadows, this secret sorrow did not yet meet with mercy ? What passed between us I need not tell you. I know now that all you said of a guilty love was meant as a solemn warning. You are pitiless, Rose ; can you imagine the torture you inflicted upon me ? You said he might marry, and I asked myself, ' why not ? ' I strove to look as if calculating the chance of a lost inheritance, but I had far other thoughts, far other feelings. I was imagining how he would look and speak with the woman he might love—for I felt that he would love her—and I was calling that woman blessed, and already envying her with all the might and passion of a jealous heart. And then, as if my cup of bitterness were not yet brimful, came the torturing thought that I might have been that woman ; it was but a chance, but had I not cast it from me, it might have been mine. I betrayed nothing of what I felt ; even to myself I would not have acknowledged it. We parted. I returned to the château ; but when I reached the gate, I paused ; I could not cross that threshold over

which—as Dante over the entrance of the awful city—I seemed to see written the fatal fiat, ‘leave all hope behind.’

“ I walked on ; the evening was clear and mild, and the road, save where some belated peasant returned from his labour, lonely. The moon was high ; on my right were narrow fields, skirted with a wood, which rose dark and indistinct against the pale blue sky ; and on my left, a plain, sloping down to the valley, in which the river flowed silently. In the deepest shade I could see the low cottages, that seemed to be stepping into the water, with their whitewashed walls and moss-grown roofs ; and my heart smote me as I thought, ‘ Oh ! that one of these had been my home, and not the proud château of Sainville.’ The cool breeze, the quietness of that evening time, soothed, however, the secret fever of my soul. I continued to walk on ; I wished to fatigue my body. I succeeded, and was at length compelled to pause and rest. There is a group of aspens that grows by the roadside ; I sat down on a mound of earth near it. The breeze rose, and stirred the branches above me, and, with the low, rustling sound, came back those remembrances, against which I was striving ceaselessly, and striving still in vain. How often had that sound greeted my ear in Sain-

ville, by that same quiet stream ! I remembered one evening, beautiful and calm like this, when I stood with him and his aunt by the river side. He was speaking to her ; I had remained a few paces behind them : he suddenly turned to address me, and his look, his tone, the gliding stream, the rustling aspen-tree, the quiet landscape beyond,—all rushed back to me in one moment. Oh ! that the past were not the past, I thought ; that the dreary present were yet an unknown future smiling before me. I bowed my head, not to weep, but I felt faint, heart-sick, and weary. A distant sound aroused me ; a horseman was coming along the road, at a slow pace. I raised my head, but without daring to look round. The sound drew nearer ; it was he ; I saw him, for the light of the moon fell full upon his face, as he rode slowly by, within a few paces of me. I was not sitting in the shade ; yet his look did not once seek me ; it was fixed on the horizon before him, and there it remained, and fell not on her who, her pride all subdued, waited his half-expected greeting with a beating heart.

Here was the sign I had asked for, and here, oh, strange are the presentiments of the heart ! was also the fulfilment of my old day-dream. I sitting by the road-side and he passing on. I looked after him

as he receded in the distance, and I thought, it has come to this ; he cares so little for me, that when we meet by chance, he either does not recognise me, or if he does, feigns not to see me. What folly once made me think, that because I had a heart I had also the privilege of feeling ? Why has God given woman a heart to love ? Why must she who loves most truly pine away in silence, whilst man, to whom love is but a pastime, alone can speak ? He is deeply offended ; I have lost, I will not say his affection, which I never had, but his friendship and esteem, yet under pain of the grossest misconstructions I must not seek to recover either. Why, since those laws of opinion are so stringent, why cannot some things be said without words ? why is there no language from heart to heart, as rapid, silent, and as truthful as the thought that springs within us ? Why, above all, am I so miserable, when so very little happiness would have done for me ! I was neither proud nor ambitious. One winter evening as I was with his aunt, he came and joined us ; he sat by her side, I, on my low stool, was thus in some sort at the feet of both. He spoke of his travels, of many a distant scene, of foreign lands which he had visited. I listened in rapt and silent attention, for I felt in my heart as if I could have been content to pass thus through life, sit-

ting at his feet and listening to his teaching. But as I remembered my love's humility, pride was once more roused within me, and I almost hated him in my heart.

“I returned to the château, and went up to my room to prepare for the morrow's departure. Childish as you will think it, I would not have dared to disobey that sign of my own choosing. My room was dark, but a light fell on the floor; that light I knew it well; it came from a window facing mine. How often, vain and credulous girl, had I watched it, standing hidden in the shade, smiling at the folly of my dreams, and yet still dreaming on. But now I would not; that time was over; I thought of it with secret sorrow,—my hand was on the curtain to shut out even that glimpse: what arrested it, what kept me, in spite of anger and struggling pride, rooted to the spot? The old spell was on me. A thin curtain fell between him and the window, but I could see his figure passing to and fro; he was very restless; his step was uneven; once he stopped short in the centre of the room, and remained there motionless full five minutes; then he sat down, but he could not stay, and soon rose once more. Never before had I seen him thus, A joy in which blended a sense of acute pain came over me. He was unhappy, restless at least. Had I any part in this? He had not retired to

rest when I left the window. What conclusions I drew from his seeming agitation! what visions I welcomed! In vain had I suffered, in vain been taught by sorrow, oh, dreams, dreams of the heart! are ye then eternal? I did not sleep until morning, yet it was early when I woke. In the clear daylight I derided the dreams I had been indulging, and again called pride to my aid. I was soon dressed and ready; I would see no one: I had a horror of all explanations—I wished, if possible, he should think I was ignorant of his return. I left; it was easy: a servant met me near the gate, and seemed surprised to see me out at this early hour, but even he did not speak—not a voice was raised, not a word was spoken to detain me in that house, to me so fatal. I felt bitter, unhappy, and slighted, and yet, by a strange contradiction, I felt also that I would not, even if I could, have torn out from the book of my destiny the pages on which fate had written the story of my love. Oh! Rose, I am very weak after all; my resentment is dying fast away: the harshness seems to vanish, and all the kindness to return. Unhappy as it has made me, I see I cannot repent this feeling: it has changed my being; it has made me better—it has given me life which I knew not till then. I was a child before, I am a woman

now. Be it so ; sorrow shall purify me still further. I will give myself a higher motive of action than I have had till now—I will suffer, and love on, though without a ray of hope."

" And you will make him the idol of your heart, and give him the place that should belong to God alone ? " said Rose, with mournful severity.

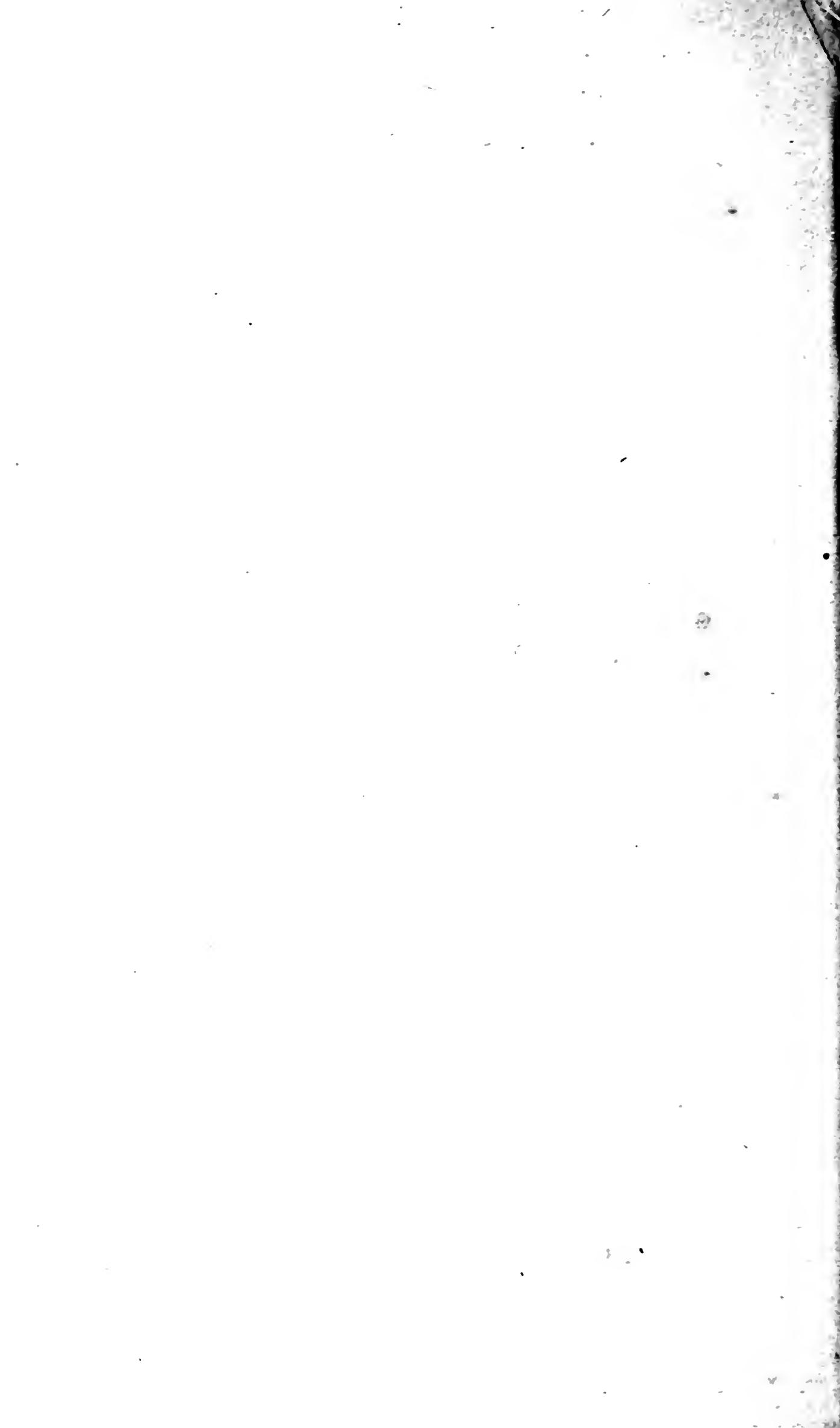
" You are right," sadly replied Nathalie, after a brief silence ; " but, oh ! Rose, since I may not forget, what can I do ? "

She spoke so submissively, and yet so despairingly, that her sister had not the heart to chide. She pressed her to her bosom, and merely said :

" Pray."

END OF VOL. II.







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